

INTIMATE CONTESTS:
MANHOOD, FRIENDSHIP, AND THE COMING OF THE CIVIL WAR

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The study of antebellum American political development has not traditionally been associated with the study of intimate male friendship. Yet, male political actors in the decades before the Civil War should be regarded as highly gendered participants in contested sets of relationships with other men and women, a view that changes the study of political history of this period. For, in the intimacy of the Washington boardinghouses, in the fraternal, often romantic language of epistolary correspondence, and in the interconnected relationships formed with their respective families, friendship profoundly shaped the personal lives and political decisions of those at the highest level of public office.

In the partisan times of the Jacksonian age, intimate male friendships were still both common and highly beneficial for individual statesmen. For this second generation of political leaders, party affiliation combined with personal commonalities, such as bachelorhood, proved decisive in creating alliances. But these friendships did not always benefit their participants, nor did they necessarily always promote the cause of Union. By the start of the Civil War, political actors utilized friendships of a more instrumental kind in the increasingly violent contest for power in the nation's capital.

Intimate male friendships proved a highly useful and durable political construction in the years before the Civil War. Over time, they shifted from enabling great political success through cross-sectional amity to producing violent personal attacks on members of opposing sections. In the fratricidal tempest of the Civil War, more than the Union was shattered: the intimate male friendships that had sustained the preceding age were also destroyed.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Thomas John Balcerski was born and raised in Ramsey in Bergen County, New Jersey, before attending Cornell University's College of Arts and Sciences as an undergraduate in 2001. He graduated *magna cum laude* in American Studies and Economics, obtaining the degree of Bachelor of Arts with distinction in all subjects in 2005. He completed graduate coursework at SUNY Stony Brook, from where he obtained the degree of Master of Arts in History in 2008. He next enrolled in the doctoral program in history at Cornell University, from which program he obtained the degree of Master of Arts in History in 2012. He is the alumni historian of the Cornell Chapter of Acacia Fraternity and the author of *Acacia Fraternity at Cornell: The First Century* (2007). While a graduate student at Cornell, he served as an instructor for Cornell Outdoor Education, a Graduate Resident Fellow at Flora Rose House as part of the West Campus Residential Initiative, Vice-President of the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly, and one of the original co-instructors of the popular course, AMST 2001: The First American University. Finally, he was the inaugural recipient of the Graduate Student Public Humanities Fellowship from the New York Council for the Humanities, in conjunction with the Cornell University Society for the Humanities.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

-iii-
Biographical Sketch

-iv-
Acknowledgments

-vii-
List of Illustrations

-ix-
List of Abbreviations

-1-
Introduction: Manly Friendship in Antebellum Politics

-21-
Chapter 1: Mr. Buchanan and His Wife

-94-
Chapter 2: Frank Pierce and the Bowdoin Boys

-157-
Chapter 3: At Home with Mason and Hunter

-253-
Chapter 4: Charles Sumner in Crisis

-319-
Chapter 5: The Caning and the Cabal

-384-
Conclusion: Male Intimacy in American Politics

-391-
Bibliography

Illustrations follow page 223

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1: The President's House, ca. 1854
- Figure 2: William Rufus King, ca. 1825
- Figure 3: James Buchanan, ca. 1840
- Figure 4: Robert C. Nicholas, ca. 1840
- Figure 5: Aaron V. Brown, ca. 1845
- Figure 6: Members of the Polk Administration, ca. 1847
- Figure 7: "Silhouettes of the Famous Class of 1825 – Bowdoin College"
- Figure 8: Jonathan Cilley, 1837
- Figure 9: John P. Hale, ca. 1844-1860
- Figure 10: Franklin Pierce, ca. 1852
- Figure 11: Jefferson Davis, ca. 1853
- Figure 12: Nathaniel Hawthorne, ca. 1852
- Figure 13: James M. Mason, ca. 1846-1860
- Figure 14: Robert M. T. Hunter, ca. 1844-1860
- Figure 15: Andrew P. Butler, ca. 1849
- Figure 16: David R. Atchison, ca. 1844-1860
- Figure 17: The Old Post Office, ca. 1846
- Figure 18: Muscoe R. H. Garnett, ca. 1859
- Figure 19: Charles Sumner, ca. 1846
- Figure 20: Henry W. Longfellow, ca. 1846
- Figure 21: Samuel G. Howe, ca. 1830s
- Figure 22: George S. Hillard, ca. 1860s

Figure 23: Cornelius C. Felton, ca. 1850s

Figure 24: “Politics and Poetry of New England,” ca. 1863

Figure 25: “The Death of Charles Sumner” (1874)

Figure 26: Preston S. Brooks, ca. 1840

Figure 27: Louis T. Wigfall, ca. 1861.

Figure 28: Preston S. Brooks, ca. 1856.

Figure 29: Laurence M. Keitt, ca. 1859

Figure 30: Henry A. Edmundson, ca. 1860

Figure 31: “Arguments of the Chivalry” (1856)

Figure 32: “Southern Chivalry – Argument versus Club’s” (1856)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADAH	Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery
BAL	Boston Athenæum, Massachusetts
BCL	George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College
BHS	Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn, N.Y.
BPL	Rare Books and Manuscript Department, Boston Public Library
CUL	Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University
CWM	Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William & Mary
DCL	Archives & Special Collections Library, Dickinson College
DUL	David M. Rubenstein Library, Duke University
HSP	Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
HUL	Houghton Library, Harvard University
GUA	Georgetown University Archives, Washington, D.C.
LCHS	Lancaster County Historical Society, Pennsylvania
LC	Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
LV	Library of Virginia, Richmond
MEHS	Maine Historical Society, Portland
MHML	Missouri History Museum Library and Research Center, St. Louis
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston
MOHS	Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia
NHHS	New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord
NJHS	New Jersey Historical Society, Newark
N-YHS	New-York Historical Society, New York
NYPL	Manuscript and Archives Division, New York Public Library

PHMC	State Archives, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
PML	Pierpont Morgan Library, New York
PSU	Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University
PUL	Rare Books and Special Collections Department, Princeton University
RDC	Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College
RL	Rosenbach Museum & Library, Philadelphia
RMC	Rare and Manuscript Collection, Cornell University
SCL	South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina
SHC	Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina
TSLA	Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville
UGA	Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Georgia
UMC	William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan
UVA	Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia
VHS	Virginia Historical Society, Richmond
YUL	Manuscript and Archives Library, Yale University

INTRODUCTION:
MANLY FRIENDSHIP IN ANTEBELLUM POLITICS

“As to manly friendship, everywhere observed in The States, there is not the first breath of it to be observed in print.”

--Walt Whitman to Ralph Waldo Emerson, August 1856

On January 20, 1854, a Friday, Senator Philip Phillips of Alabama paid a visit to a boardinghouse on F Street, located between Ninth and Tenth Streets just behind the Patent Office. It was a typically cold winter's day in Washington, and once there, the senator was suitably received. Before him was an impressive gathering of southern Democrats: Senators James M. Mason and Robert M.T. Hunter of Virginia, chairmen of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee and Finance Committee, respectively; Senator David R. Atchison of Missouri, who was also the President *pro tem* of the Senate; Senator Andrew P. Butler of South Carolina, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee; and Representative William O. Goode of Virginia's fourth district. The five congressmen (Mason, Hunter, Atchison, Butler, and Goode) lived together as messmates in the boardinghouse on F Street—a group that has been known to history as the “F Street Mess.” Although Phillips himself lived in a boardinghouse nearby, the purpose of his visit on that particular Friday in January was not social in nature. He had a far more serious and consequential aim in mind: to discuss the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. The repeal would be included as part of the organization of the Kansas and Nebraska territories, then under discussion in the Senate. Without the support of this important bloc of southern Democrats, Phillips knew, the repeal stood no chance.¹

¹ The meeting between Phillips and the members of the boardinghouse on F Street is recounted in an unpublished autobiography prepared for his children; see “A Summary of the Principal Events of My Life, Written between the 10th and 20th June 1876,” and a typescript of the same, Philip Phillips Papers,

The reasons for the repeal of the Missouri Compromise were simple enough: the territories of Kansas and Nebraska lay mostly north of the appointed line of latitude at thirty-six degrees, thirty minutes (36°30') above which slavery was legally prohibited. For all its geographic arbitrariness, this imaginary line of latitude had effectively balanced the Union between free and slave states for over three decades. The acquisition of new territories after the war with Mexico, however, had permanently upset the old balance. The admission of California in 1850 as a free state put the slave states at a decided disadvantage. With the combined population of the free states surpassing those of the slave states, Southerners needed new territories in which to expand. In addition to the imperial visions driven by the filibusters in Central America, and especially in Cuba, the demands of the slave-based economy compelled the South to claim Kansas, at least symbolically, as a potential haven for slavery. Senator Phillips of Alabama, born to a Jewish family in Charleston, South Carolina, and later to become a southern Unionist during the Civil War, at first glance seems an unlikely advocate of slavery's westward expansion. Yet he represented well his adopted state of Alabama—once the edge of the southwestern cotton frontier—whose prosperity depended on the availability of more land, and ever more enslaved African Americans, to produce an unending supply of cotton. Now, his slaveholding constituents clamored for just that—more, more, more. In 1854, the future of the slave system, and, by extension, the continued growth of this expression of American capitalism, suddenly depended on allowing enslavers to settle in the plains of Kansas.²

box 13, LC. Phillips maintained a lifelong interest in his part of the events of January 1854; see his letter to the editor, "The Repeal of the Missouri Act," *Washington Constitution*, Aug. 25, 1860. See also Henry B. Learned, "The Relation of Philip Phillips to the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise in 1854," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 8, no. 4 (Mar. 1922): 303-17.

² The expansion of slavery into the western territories and into Central America has long been recognized as a critical point in the political conflict preceding the Civil War; see esp. Michael A. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Amy Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum*

This was not Senator Phillip's first meeting about the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Two days earlier, Phillips had discussed the proposal with Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories, who earlier that week had introduced the western territories organization bills in the Senate, and with John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky, another leading states' rights southern Democrat in the Senate. The two men had found Phillips's proposal satisfactory, particularly Douglas, who realized that the repeal of the compromise would permit "popular sovereignty" in which the residents of the western territories could decide the question of slavery for themselves. But before advancing any further with the repeal, Phillips needed to ascertain the feelings of the leading southern representatives of his party. Accordingly, he paid the aforementioned visit to the boardinghouse on F Street, where, as he later remembered, there was a "general concurrence in the propriety of the repeal." All agreed that Phillips's plan required the support of President Franklin Pierce. Given the pressing desire to introduce the proposed repeal in the Senate on the following Monday, the meeting would need to take place soon.³

The next day, a Saturday, Phillips told Douglas about the outcome of his meeting with the members of the F Street Mess. "Very good," Douglas reportedly said. "To-morrow night we will go to the White House, and see President Pierce on the subject." Phillips objected to making the visit on a Sunday, because, like many in Washington society, President Pierce strictly observed the Sabbath and did not conduct any official business on that day. Douglas assured

American Empire (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005). For the critical connection of slavery to the growth of American capitalism, see Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014). About Phillips's pre-congressional years, see David T. Morgan, "Philip Phillips and Internal Improvements in Mid-Nineteenth Century Alabama," *Alabama Review* 34 (April 1981): 83-93.

³ Phillips, "Summary of the Principal Events of My Life" (typescript), 33. For a review of the many attempts at popular sovereignty before the Civil War, see Christopher Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty: Slavery, Manifest Destiny, and the Radicalization of Southern Politics* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2012).

Phillips that the visit would “not be unacceptable.” Accounts vary as to what happened next. Most likely, at nine o’clock the next morning and before church services were to begin, Senator Douglas arrived in his carriage by pre-arrangement at the boardinghouse of Mason, Hunter, Atchison, Butler, and Goode. Waiting at the boardinghouse also were Phillips and Breckinridge. The question of travel arrangements to the White House then followed, with a singular snafu ensuing: Douglas could only fit one additional person in his carriage. Mason, Hunter, Goode, Phillips, and Breckinridge agreed to walk (Butler did not attend), leaving Atchison the honor of the extra seat in Douglas’s carriage. Thus the two leading Democrats of the proposed legislation to organize the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, one from the free state of Illinois and the other from the slave state of Missouri, rode together to the meeting with the president.⁴

At some point, Stephen Douglas, and perhaps some of the group of congressmen en route to the White House, had also paid a call to Jefferson Davis, the Secretary of War and a very close member of the president’s cabinet. Douglas had told Davis of the plan to repeal the compromise line and of the urgent need to consult with the president before the upcoming session of Congress on Monday. As Davis later recalled, “I told the gentlemen that they were either a day too late or too early, that the President received no visitors on Sunday, but that they could readily consult him to-morrow.” Douglas insisted otherwise and made clear to Davis that the group had come to him to “secure for them an interview with the President.” Davis finally concurred and sought out Pierce in his private apartments on the second floor of the White House. Perhaps against his better judgment, Pierce agreed to meet with the congressmen on that Sunday morning. All seemed to be in place.⁵

⁴ Phillips, “Summary of the Principal Events of My Life” (typescript), 33.

⁵ The remembrances of Jefferson Davis are given in a letter to Susan B. Dixon, Sept. 27, 1879, in Susan B. Dixon, *True History of the Missouri Compromise and Its Repeal* (Cincinnati: Robert Clark Co., 1899), 457-60; and Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederation Government*, 2 vols. (New York: D.

Powered by horse and carriage, Douglas and Atchison accordingly arrived first at the White House. When the remainder of the group assembled, they were taken to the large oval library on the second floor. There they found Pierce, Douglas, and Atchison, all standing. Senator Phillips remembered being “struck by the cold formality which seemed to prevail.” The subject of the western territories organization bill was discussed, including most critically, the new language prepared by Phillips that effectively repealed the provisions of the Missouri Compromise. Pierce initially “hesitated” at the idea, as Breckinridge later reported. The president did not wish to proceed lightly. “Gentlemen,” he said gravely, “you are entering on a serious undertaking, and the ground should be well surveyed before the first step is taken.” The meeting lasted some two hours, with no formal record made of what was said. Satisfied that the president had agreed to provide the administration’s support to the repeal, the group returned to their respective boardinghouses. Their mission a success, the Kansas and Nebraska bills, with the explicit language repealing the Missouri Compromise, would be introduced simultaneously in the House and in the Senate on the following day. As the clock struck midnight in the darkness of that January night, no one suspected the firestorm about to ignite across the country.⁶

* * * * *

Appleton & Co., 1881), 1:28. On Davis’s involvement in the meeting with Pierce, see also William J. Cooper, Jr., *Jefferson Davis, American* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 266-68. On the configuration of the White House during Franklin Pierce’s administration, see William Seale, *The President’s House: A History*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: White House Historical Association, 1986), 1:305-32; and the detailed floor plans presented by the White House Museum, available at <<http://www.whitehousemuseum.org>>.

⁶ Phillips, “Summary of the Principal Events of My Life,” 34; and John C. Breckinridge to Robert J. Breckinridge, Mar. 6, 1854, Breckinridge Family Papers, 1752-1965, box 165, LC. The meeting did attract the notice of Washington journalists; see *New York Herald*, Jan. 24, 1854 (Senator Jesse D. Bright of Indiana was reported to have attended the meeting with the president, but contemporary evidence does not support the claim). On the meeting with Pierce, see also Perley O. Ray, *The Repeal of the Missouri Compromise: Its Origin and Authorship* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1909), esp. 212-16; Roy F. Nichols, *Franklin Pierce: Young Hickory of the Granite Hills* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1931), esp. 321-34; William C. Davis, *Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, Symbol* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1974), 100-110; and William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990-2007), 1:550-56.

The now infamous meeting of Stephen Douglas and the F Street Mess with Franklin Pierce successfully enabled the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, through a piece of legislation that has been known to history as the Kansas-Nebraska Act. In their studies of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, historians have most commonly investigated the legislative “process,” considering the motivations of individual actors in introducing the bills, the ensuing debates in Congress, and the effects of their passage on the subsequent developments that preceded the Civil War. Related to these efforts, historians have exerted significant energy studying whether party or section offers better explanatory power in understanding the events of the 1850s. Consequently, the personal relationships of political actors have often been reduced to mere by-products of greater structural forces. In a recent reassessment of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, however, the esteemed political historian Marc E. Neely, Jr., has proposed that scholars must “look at areas other than legislative process for a reassessment,” with new attention focused on “political culture” and “republicanism” to explain the “extraordinary political enthusiasm of the 1850s.” Neely’s call for renewed attention to the political culture of the 1850s is a welcomed shift, for historians should take seriously the highly gendered personal relationships that constituted the deeply masculine political culture of the period. Such an emphasis would shed new light not only on the unfolding of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, but on the major political events of the antebellum era more generally.⁷

⁷ Marc E. Neely, Jr., “The Kansas-Nebraska Act in American Political Culture: The Road to Bladensburg and the *Appeal of the Independent Democrats*,” in *The Nebraska-Kansas Act of 1854*, ed. John R. Wunder and Joann M. Ross (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2008): 13-46, here 13-14. The focus on “process” draws upon Roy F. Nichols, “The Kansas-Nebraska Act: A Century of Historiography,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 43, no. 2 (1956): 187-212. For an excellent summary essay of the major schools of thought in the study of antebellum political history, see Joel H. Silbey, “The Political World of the Antebellum Presidents,” in *A Companion to the Antebellum Presidents, 1837-1861*, ed. Silbey (Malden, Mass.: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 7-42. For helpful studies of American political culture before the Civil War, see such examples as Daniel W. Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979); Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture:*

This dissertation argues that gendered personal relationships among political men, which I classify under the broad category of “friendship,” is a constitutive part of the formation of the political culture of the antebellum period and integral to the study of the events surrounding the introduction of and subsequent responses to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. My argument seeks to shift the study of the Kansas-Nebraska Act from that of the legislative “process” to that of the multiple cultural processes and forms that enabled the creation and sustainment of political power. Such a move entails an investigation of the networks of personal relationships of those political men who enacted congressional legislation and exerted executive authority in the 1850s. In so doing, a series of unexpected questions emerge. What made the F Street Mess so powerful? Did their consolidation in one boardinghouse encourage the development of the political culture of the states’ rights, southern Democrats? For that matter, did the boardinghouse itself provide, to borrow a phrase from Alexis de Tocqueville, a “mediating structure” to their power? And if we take these political men to be gendered subjects, might their relationships also tell us something about the varying concepts of manhood that proliferated in the practice of politics, or of the friendships formed between political men in that practice? Likewise, how were these friendships different from those of an earlier era? In essence, how do these relationships between political men contribute to the traditional coming of the Civil War narrative?

Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983); Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1983); Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984): 620-47; Nicole Etcheson, *The Emerging Midwest: Upland Southerners and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1996); Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2000); Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2002); Marc E. Neely, Jr., *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005); and the various essays in Gary W. Gallagher and Rachel A. Shelden, ed., *A Political Nation: New Directions in Mid-Nineteenth Century American Political History* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2012).

To answer these questions, we return to the boardinghouse, itself an important part of American political culture since the late Eighteenth Century. In the early days of Washington, the shared quarters of a boardinghouse were known as a “mess,” a term that highlights the essential function of eating performed there. Unlike in today’s world where instant communication and cross-country flights are routine occurrences, the defining characteristics of the early Congresses were isolation and instability. Fully one-third or more of its members left every two years. In 1828, the number of boardinghouses had nearly tripled since the start of the century, attributable to an increase in the number of men in Congress from newer states and larger delegations from existing ones. The first historian of congressional domestic political culture described the scene this way: “These were the boardinghouse fraternities, which almost all legislators joined when they came to Washington—the members who took their meals together, who lived together at the same lodginghouse, and who spend most of their leisure time together.” The congressional mess became the “basic social units” of the Washington community in the first four decades of the new nation.⁸

⁸ James S. Young, *The Washington Community, 1820-1828* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), esp. 143-153, 199-200, here 98. For studies of boardinghouse culture in the early republican period that variously agree or disagree with Young, see Allan G. Bogue and Mark Paul Marlaire, “Of Mess and Men: The Boardinghouse and Congressional Voting, 1821-1842,” *American Journal of Political Science* 19, no. 2 (May 1975): 207-30; Richard R. John, “Affairs of Office: The Executive Departments, the Election of 1828, and the Making of the Democratic Party,” in *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History*, ed. Meg Jacobs, William J. Novak, and Julian E. Zelizer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003): 50-84; Cynthia D. Earman, “Messing Around: Entertaining and Accommodating Congress, 1800-1830” in *Establishing Congress: The Removal to Washington, D.C., and the Election of 1800*, ed. Kenneth R. Bowling and Donald R. Kennon (Athens: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2005): 128-147; and for the antebellum period, see Rachel A. Sheldon, *Washington Brotherhood: Politics, Social Life, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2013). About boardinghouse culture more generally, see Wendy Gamber, *The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2007); and David Faflik, *Boarding Out: Inhabiting the American Urban Literary Imagination, 1840-1860* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2012). The directories of the early congressional boardinghouses have been compiled in Perry M. Goldman and James S. Young, ed., *The United States Congressional Directories, 1789-1840* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1973).

Thirty years later, the boardinghouse fraternity of old had lost much of its earlier intimacy. The change accompanied the growing size of the Congress: by 1857, 237 representatives and 66 senators resided in Washington, more than double the 107 representatives and 34 senators of 1801. Communal boardinghouses continued to exist, but improved accommodations reduced their prevalence. New hotels, such as Brown's, Willard's, Gambling's, and the National, offered attractive amenities and competed for the congressman's business. So too by the late 1850s, the country had witnessed the rise and fall of a two-party system, in which Democrats and Whigs had vied for political power at the highest levels. Likewise, a war with Mexico had yielded rancorous debates over the extension of slavery into the newly acquired territories. The expansion of the system of chattel slavery, once hoped by many in the founding generation to fade from view, had instead become the most divisive issue of the day. In an expected corollary, the living arrangements in Washington mirrored the increasingly sectional trends: by 1850, boardinghouses were far more likely to be organized along party (and often sectional) lines than not, and by 1860, completely so (lodging at hotels was likewise largely sectional). The cross-party and cross-sectional comity, once a hallmark of the boardinghouse fraternities of the early republican days, was now largely a relic of the past. The F Street Mess's role in the repeal of the Missouri Compromise demonstrates just how far boardinghouse groups had moved away from promoting national unity. They had become instead crucial sites for the enactment of highly partisan and sectional agendas.⁹

⁹ On the prevalence of hotels vis-à-vis boardinghouses in antebellum Washington, see Rachel A. Shelden, "Messmates' Union: Friendship, Politics, and Living Arrangements in the Capital City, 1845-1861," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 4 (2011): 453-80. No compilation of boardinghouses for the period after 1840 has been prepared. For a listing of extant Washington city directories, see Dorothy N. Spear, *Bibliography of American Directories Through 1860* (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1961), 371-74. There are also seven extant congressional directories for the years 1848 to 1861; see *Congressional Directories, 32nd-36th Congresses* (Washington D.C.: J & G.S. Gideon, 1852-1861). The full set of data, when collected and analyzed, reveals that no new cross-sectional *and* cross-party

The members of the F Street Mess also demonstrate another new feature of the antebellum period: the instrumentality of male friendship toward sectional ends. Once thought to be a crucial way to bind together the new nation, the “romantic” friendships between men of the Revolutionary generation, anchored in sentiment and sympathy, had mostly passed from the scene by the 1830s. Friendships formed among politicians had become far more partisan in the charged climate engendered by the second two-party system. The very word “friend” had been transformed along a more overtly political vein; for example, public men usually wrote of friendship when making recommendations for patronage positions. While friendships among congressmen were more consciously partisan, many remained cross-sectional through much of the 1840s. As the political figures of the second two-party system aged and faded from the scene, however, a new class of politicians committed to sectional issues began to dominate Washington. By 1860, cross-party and cross-sectional friendships, much like the boardinghouses organized along similar lines, were all but extinct.¹⁰

boardinghouses formed, and very few cross-sectional *or* cross-party boardinghouses formed, between the years 1850 and 1861. Of the cross-sectional boardinghouses, they usually contained one or two members from the opposite section, usually from the Chesapeake region (such as Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Virginia) and the middle-Atlantic states (such as Pennsylvania). By 1861, no cross-sectional boardinghouses remained (though several hotels housed congressmen from different sections).

¹⁰ Friendship studies have recently become a burgeoning area of scholarship. The study of male friendship in antebellum America has been part of the broader study of manhood, itself a field often divided along sectional lines; examples for the North include Karen V. Hansen, “‘Our Eyes Behold Each Other’: Masculinity and Intimate Friendship in Antebellum New England” in *Men’s Friendships*, ed. Peter M. Nardi (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1992): 35-58; Richard Godbeer, *The Overflowing of Friendship: Love between Men and the Creation of the American Republic* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2009), esp. 1-16; and Thomas J. Balcerski, “‘Under These Classic Shades Together’: Intimate Male Friendships Among Antebellum College Students,” *Pennsylvania History* 80, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 169-203. For the South, see Drew G. Faust, *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977); Anya Jabour, “Male Friendship and Masculinity in the Early National South: William Wirt and His Friends,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 83-111; and for the case of enslaved African American men, see Sergio Lussanna “‘No Band of Brothers Could Be More Loving’: Enslaved Male Homosociality, Friendship, and Resistance in the Antebellum American South,” *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 4 (Summer 2013): 872-95. While I focus primarily on friendships between men, friendships between men and women have received recent attention; see Cassandra A. Good, “Friendly Relations: Situating

The changing norms of friendship in the decades preceding the Civil War correlated to diverging views of manhood in the North and South. The members of the F Street Mess stood as exemplars of a southern “aggressive” manhood, a concept based on a system of honor that valued the racial, social, and economic mastery over perceived inferiors. In their way stood representatives from the northern states, whose societal notions of the proper expression of “restrained” manhood differed considerably from their southern colleagues. These differences in manhood were magnified in an increasingly hostile political environment in Washington. Congressmen now entered the Capitol armed with pistols and knives, ready to defend themselves at the first sign of violence. Affairs of honor between members—a hallmark of the first decade of the Congress—once again became commonplace, with the caning of Charles Sumner in 1856 symbolizing a culmination of these disagreements among competing practitioners of manhood. If political questions required the expression of true manhood, the representatives sent to Washington could no longer agree what “true” meant. In essence, the political culture of the day had lost sight of the commonalities that had once bound together the men and the communities they represented. From the violence in the halls of Congress, the country was but a short step away from the killing fields of the years ahead.¹¹

Friendships Between Men and Women in the Early American Republic, 1780-1830,” *Gender & History* 24, no. 1 (April 2012): 18-34.

¹¹ For the continued valence of honor and mastery among the southern gentry, see Craig T. Friend and Lorri Glover, “Rethinking Southern Masculinity,” in *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, ed. Friend and Glover (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2004), vii-xiv; for the North, the classic study is E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from The Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993). A useful historiographic treatment of the studies of both southern and northern manhood is offered by Bryan C. Rindfleisch, “‘What it Means to Be a Man’: Contested Masculinity in the Early Republic and Antebellum America,” *History Compass* 10/11 (2012): 852-65. On “aggressive” versus “restrained” manhood in the era of the Civil War, see, most recently, Lorien Foote, *The Gentleman and the Roughs: Manhood, Honor, and Violence in the Union Army* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2010), esp. 1-16.

To conceive of the coming of the Civil War as a series of intimate contests between men draws conceptually on historians of gender and sexuality (indeed, the title of this dissertation nods to the pioneering work of John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman). Likewise, a critical theoretical engagement of this dissertation is with the analytical category of gender, given treatment and subsequent reconsideration by such scholars as Joan W. Scott and Jeanne Boydston. In what may be read as a call for political historians to incorporate gender into their analysis, Scott contends that “politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics.” War, diplomacy, and high politics also inform her analysis; for, “high politics itself is a gendered concept...precisely in its exclusion of women from its work.” In addition, the theory of gender as performance, articulated powerfully by Judith Butler, permits a reading of men as gendered subjects in a constant series of performative acts. Until recently, the historiography of antebellum politics has obscured the potencies of these categories. Over the past two decades, however, several studies have enriched and complicated the categories of womanhood and manhood with respect to high politics (the contributions of the “new men’s history” have produced further refinements in this sub-field). Taken together, historians have begun to accept the challenge to historicize such categories as gender, sex, and sexuality in their accounts of politics and political actors.¹²

¹² My argument that intimacy found a wide range of outlets among men of the highest political office echoes John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), esp. 55-167. While my interpretations may vary from those presented by scholars of same-sex attractions, orientations, and relationships, they are nevertheless extremely helpful in their methodological approaches; see, for example, Leonard H. Ellis, “Men Among Men: An Exploration of All-Male Relationships in Victorian America,” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia Univ., 1982); Jonathan N. Katz, *Love Stories: Sex Between Men Before Homosexuality* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001); William Benemann, *Male-Male Intimacy in Early America: Beyond Romantic Friendships* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and the essays presented in Thomas A. Foster, ed., *Long Before Stonewall: Histories of Same-Sex Sexuality in Early America* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2007). On gender’s salience in historical analysis, see Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (Dec. 1986): 1053-75, here 1073; and the useful rejoinders in Jeanne Boydston, “Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis,” *Gender & History*

While the analytical category of manhood has been unevenly integrated into studies of antebellum politics, a subset of historians of this period have consistently emphasized the importance of male friendship among political leaders. For the most part, these historians have been engaged in biographical projects, which has enabled them greater insights into the lives of their subjects. Recently, multi-character political biography has witnessed a resurgence of scholarly interest among historians and has likewise emerged as the preferred method for more popular histories. In part, this renewed interest in political biography stems from a desire to tell the stories of a group of actors' lives and subsequently embraces some of the best aspects of the historian's craft; for, as William Cronon has recently argued, telling stories is what historians can and should do best. By implication, studying the most important relationships of historical subjects' lives offers a compelling way for historians to examine such abstract concepts as gender and sexuality. When the lens is applied to those men who held the highest of political office, the importance of their conceptions of manhood and friendship becomes ever more consequential for the nation as a whole.¹³

20, no. 3 (Nov. 2008): 558-83; Joanne Meyerowitz, "A History of 'Gender,'" *American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (Dec. 2008): 1346-56; and Joan W. Scott, "Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?," *Diogenes* 57 (Oct. 2010): 7-14. On the theory of performance as constitutive to gender, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). For an apt reflection on the promises and pitfalls of the new men's history, see Toby L. Ditz, "The New Men's History and the Peculiar Absence of Gendered Power: Some Remedies from Early American Gender History," *Gender and History* 16, no. 1 (April 2004): 1-35. Other important studies of gender in the antebellum period, particularly the connection between manhood and politics, include Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987); John F. Marzalek, *The Petticoat Affair: Manners, Mutiny, and Sex in Andrew Jackson's White House* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1997); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997); Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1998); and Edward E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002).

¹³ Political biography of the antebellum period has a venerable tradition, dating back to the Nineteenth Century, that continues to this day. The multi-character approach has become a popular approach among academic historians in recent years; see for example, Eric H. Walther, *The Fire-Eaters* (Baton Rouge:

The challenges in telling the stories of those subjects who lived long ago are, of course, numerous. In an article on microhistory, Jill Lepore reviews the differences between that method and the more traditional genre of biography. She proposes that biographers “generally worry about becoming too intimate with their subjects and later betraying them,” a conclusion drawn after reviewing the works of just some of the many historians who have employed the biographical approach in their scholarship. It is interesting to note that Lepore’s proposition relies upon the idea that biographers must understand their subjects on an intimate level to tell the stories of their lives, because the concept of intimacy forms an essential part of this dissertation. In the language of nineteenth-century politicians, intimacy frequently accompanied the close familiarity engendered by friendship. Starting from an archive necessarily marred by incompleteness (and in many cases, incoherence), this dissertation attempts to reanimate the valences of those intimacies that once sustained these relationships, so as to illustrate their inherent relation to political power.¹⁴

This dissertation has two primary objectives that follow from a unifying desire to locate male friendships in the traditional coming of the Civil War narrative. First, my project seeks to trace the lifelong importance of male friendships to the political leaders of the 1850s. To accomplish this task, I have determined to take a biographical approach to my subjects. The

Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1992); Stephen W. Berry, II, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002); and Frederick J. Blue, *No Taint of Compromise: Crusaders in Antislavery Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2005). A recent popular history to employ the multi-character approach is David McCullough, *The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011). On storytelling, see William Cronon, “Storytelling,” *American Historical Review* 118, no. 1 (Feb. 2013): 1-19.

¹⁴ For a comparison of microhistory and biography, see Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001): 129-144, here 141. On the often intimate relationship between biographer and subject, see the various essays in Carol Ascher, Louise DeSalvo, and Sara Ruddick, ed., *Between Women: Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers, and Artists Write About Their Work on Women* (Boston: Beacon Press 1984); and for a judicious critique of political biography, see Patrick O’Brien, “Is Political Biography a Good Thing?,” *Contemporary British History* 10, no 4 (1996): 60-66.

genre of biography, the literary scholar Paula R. Backscheider has written, “assumes that what a person does expresses an inner life—personality, motives, aspirations, character.” The “inner life” of some of these men was not always pleasant to explore. The psychology of those who defended the institution of slavery, and who were often slaveholders themselves, challenges the biographer to face directly the darker sides of American history. Nevertheless, the rewards for such an undertaking are many. Through an exploration of a subject’s entire life, biographers may truly appreciate the lifelong importance of human relationships. With the study of multiple, related actors, moreover, patterns tend to emerge. The Greeks once called the telling of the collective biography of a class of elites by the name *prosopography*. Scholars have returned to this concept over the past few decades, including those who have applied the method to the study of the coming of the Civil War. The early lives of political leaders—and most especially, their conceptions of politics, friendship, and manhood—all mattered to the antebellum period, and they matter still.¹⁵

Second, my project aims to offer deeper insights into the political culture of male friendship in the early Nineteenth Century, as a way of presenting the class of politicians who emerged in the Jacksonian period and beyond. As such, this project does not take as its starting point the traditional beginning of the antebellum period, namely, the end of the war with Mexico in 1848, and continue with a survey of the major events leading to the secession winter of 1860-1861. Rather, the narrative moves between time periods to illustrate the interpersonal conflicts among the very leaders who represented the nation during these critical years. Such an approach has produced a number of unexpected connections over time, with many of the same players

¹⁵ Paula R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press), xviii. On *prosopography*, see Lawrence Stone, “Prosopography,” *Daedalus* 100, no. 1 (Winter 1971): 46-71; and for a recent application of this method to antebellum history, see Susan Radomsky, “The Social Life of Politics: Washington’s Official Society and the Emergence of a National Political Elite, 1800-1876,” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 2005).

intersecting at a variety of different moments. I have accordingly chosen to start with the oldest of my subjects and proceed forward in time. Through a multi-perspectival biographical method, the political significance of these friendships is positioned over the actors' lifetimes; through a gendered analysis, the personal significance of these friendships with other men and women becomes clearer. In this way, this dissertation refigures the political origins and consequences the Kansas-Nebraska Act as a series of long-standing, intimate contests not only among representatives of differing political ideologies, parties, and sections, but also among competing sets of male friends.¹⁶

This dissertation complicates the dominance of party and section as the overarching schemas in studying the causes of the Civil War, through a focus on the intimacies articulated through political friendships and their intersections with those very same structures. In presenting each chapter, I begin with a look at education, a formal preparation very different from today, before proceeding to my subjects' early adult years. As noted, unexpected themes emerge in common: for instance, many men began their political careers by delivering speeches on the Fourth of July. Moving from the Fourth of July oration to the halls of Congress, the five chapters trace how male friendship shaped the actors' early political involvements and wartime services. The chapters then explore the defining episodes of their respective subjects' careers, centered as they are on important moments of the 1850s. The chapters then conclude by looking at the later incidents of their careers and the actors' retrospective gazes at those friendships that had once animated their political efforts. Each chapter thus explores a male friendship that significantly contributed to the coming of the Civil War.¹⁷

¹⁶ On the scholarly uses of political culture, see Glen Gendzel, "Political Culture: Genealogy of a Concept," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28, no. 2 (Autumn 1997): 225-50.

¹⁷ On education in this period, see the essays in Roger Geiger, ed., *The American College in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 2000); and Robert F. Pace, *Halls of*

Chapter one looks at the friendship of James Buchanan and William Rufus King, two bachelor senators of strict Jacksonian principles. Despite different party backgrounds, their early educations and congressional careers impressed upon each man the need for strong connections with other men to achieve success in politics. In 1834, the two men became messmates and lodged at the same boardinghouse until their separation ten years later. Publicly visible as a political and personal duo, their friendship attracted a good deal of gossip, mostly from competitors within the Democratic Party. In part, the gossip concerned their status as bachelors, and indeed, for both men, their political and familial obligations ultimately overwhelmed whatever capacity they possessed for courtly romance. Nevertheless, the two men intertwined members of their respective extended families. They also helped to unite the northern and southern wings of the Democratic Party through the 1850s. In their friendship with each other, Buchanan and King found not only great political success at the highest levels of office (King the vice-presidency in 1852, and Buchanan the presidency in 1856), but also the most intimate friendship of their respective lives.

Chapter two concerns Franklin Pierce and his lifelong friendships with several of his Bowdoin College classmates, including Jonathan Cilley, John P. Hale, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the translation of those college friendships onto members of his cabinet, most notably with Secretary of War Jefferson Davis. As compared to the bachelors Buchanan and King, the New Hampshire native Pierce suffered many tragic circumstances during his marriage to Jane Means Appleton. Like Buchanan and King, Franklin Pierce enjoyed numerous male friendships, mostly with other married men across times of war and peace (Pierce volunteered to serve in the war

Honor: College Men in the Old South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2004). On the political significance of July 4 orations, see Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1997); and Paul Quigley, "Independence Day Dilemmas in the American South, 1848-1865," *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 2 (May 2009): 235-66.

with Mexico). While gossip did not plague Pierce's male friendships, their intensity was, if anything, more destructive to the personal and political careers of the men involved, and of the nation as a whole. The introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, as has already been suggested, relied in large part on the friendship between Pierce and Davis. Meanwhile, Nathaniel Hawthorne's literary career suffered from his steadfast support of Pierce. His campaign biography, *Life of Pierce* (1852), and his dedication to Franklin Pierce in his memoir, *Our Old Home* (1863), evinced a subtle calculus that male friendship exacted a higher premium than the ambitions of literary reputation or book sales. If Buchanan and King represent a successful deployment of male friendship in politics, the volatile friendships of Pierce show their tragic downside.

Chapter three returns to the F Street Mess, where specific attention is paid to the decades long friendship of James M. Mason and Robert M.T. Hunter of Virginia. Mason and Hunter entered political life as disciples of John C. Calhoun (and not coincidentally, each man enjoyed a personal connection with his mentor through a shared residence in a Washington boardinghouse). Over time, they returned to the Senate and carried on the legacy of Calhoun, who died shortly after his final speech during the congressional debates of 1850. Subsequent to their mentor's death, Mason and Hunter expanded their mess to include Andrew P. Butler of South Carolina (a widower) and, later, David R. Atchison of Missouri (a bachelor). Together, the F Street Mess formed a solid southern bloc that permitted them an unusual level of influence with Franklin Pierce and Stephen Douglas. Later, after the original mess had broken up, Mason and Hunter organized a new mess with younger, more radical members of the Congress, including Hunter's nephew Muscoe R.H. Garnett. With the coming of the secession winter of

1860-1861, their mess remained a persistent voice for southern unity, states' rights, and the increasingly untenable Union that John C. Calhoun had once envisioned.

Chapter four turns to the radical anti-slavery senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts. Like his Democratic opponents, Sumner (another bachelor) had relied on male friendships for emotional support from an early age. He also utilized the associations afforded by such relationships to build his early political prospects. Once elected to the Senate, Sumner entered Washington with the intentions of standing as a force for radical anti-slavery politics; yet, his early experiences in the capital left him enamored with some of the very people whom he had vowed to oppose. In time, he became isolated from his friends both at home and in the capital. When the western territories organization bill of 1854 entered into view, Sumner attacked it with unexpected vehemence. Two years later, he would deliver his famous "Crime Against Kansas" speech with such passion that colleagues questioned his sanity. His caning at the hands of Preston Brooks, while sensational on the national level, was not completely unexpected either. In time, Sumner recovered from the caning and returned to the Senate with newfound vengeance. As the years passed by, however, he began to disagree with the very friends who had once sustained him. At the end of his life, Charles Sumner was alone not only politically, but personally as well.

Chapter five investigates the life of Preston Brooks, with particular emphasis on the instrumental use of male friendship in the enactment of the caning of Charles Sumner. From an early age, Preston Brooks was groomed in the culture of honor. He participated in multiple affairs of honor throughout his life, including a near fatal duel with Louis T. Wigfall. Like Franklin Pierce, Brooks turned to military service to prove his mettle on the battlefield. Throughout his life, the bonds of kinship remained foundational to his sense of political identity.

After Charles Sumner delivered his “Crime Against Kansas” speech, Brooks conspired with Laurence M. Keitt of South Carolina and Henry A. Edmundson of Virginia to chastise the Massachusetts senator. The trio was motivated by a desire to defend not only family and southern honor, but to prove something of their collective manhood as well. The caning of Sumner most profoundly reveals a competition over manhood, between the northern restrained manhood epitomized by Sumner and the southern martial manhood of Brooks and his associates.

That the political culture of the 1850s centered on masculine friendship seemed almost common knowledge to Walt Whitman. In an open letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson in August 1856—later included in the appendix to that year’s publication of *Leaves of Grass*—Whitman lamented how little had been written on the subject: “As to manly friendship, everywhere observed in The States,” the poet began, “there is not the first breath of it to be observed in print.” Whitman would correct this absence with the publication of his *Calamus* poems in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*; yet, the potentialities of male friendship in antebellum politics have remained largely obscure to scholars. In the charged climate of the 1850s, politics was most certainly an enterprise driven by personalities variously in conflict and concordance with one another. As men caught between larger forces of which they sometimes had only passing control, they naturally turned to one another to play their political hands. Unlike in the cantankerous climate of today’s partisan bickering, more than words were on the line in the decade before the Civil War: their very lives and limbs often depended on the strength of the bonds they had formed with one another.¹⁸

¹⁸ Walt Whitman to Ralph W. Emerson, Aug. 1856, “Appendix to Leaves of Grass, 1856,” in *Walt Whitman Completed Poetry and Collected Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982): 1326-37. On Whitman as poet of male friendship, see David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), esp. 383-403; and W. Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973), esp. 407-27.

CHAPTER 1:

MR. BUCHANAN AND HIS WIFE

“For myself, I shall feel lonely in the midst of Paris, for there I shall have no Friends with whom I can commune as with my own thoughts.”

--William Rufus King to James Buchanan, May 14, 1844

The partnership of James Buchanan and William Rufus King was the most politically significant cross-sectional collaboration in the antebellum period. Theirs was a relationship that, on the one hand, seems quite unexpected. The two men hailed from different parts of the country (King from Alabama, Buchanan from Pennsylvania), from varying socioeconomic status (King, a scion of wealthy slaveholding planters in piedmont North Carolina, versus Buchanan, the son of a yeoman shopkeeper on the western frontier), and opposite political parties (King a confirmed Democratic-Republican to Buchanan's Federalist beginnings). On the other hand, they shared quite a bit in common. Both men shared similar ethno-cultural origins (descendants of Scots Irish immigrants), attended college in an age when higher education was a luxury (King at the University of North Carolina and Buchanan at Dickinson College), and, most critically, did not marry (though Buchanan failed on numerous occasions to find a wife). Each man formed lasting friendships with other men, with perhaps the most important of their political careers being with each other.¹

¹ Important biographies and works of James Buchanan include George T. Curtis, *Life of James Buchanan: Fifteenth President of the United States*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1883); and continue with John B. Moore, ed., *The Works of James Buchanan, Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*, 12 vols. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1908-1911); Philip G. Auchampaugh, *James Buchanan and His Cabinet on the Eve of Secession* (Lancaster, Penna.: privately printed, 1926); and the two-part article, Auchampaugh, “James Buchanan, the Squire from Lancaster: The Squire's Home Town,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 55, no. 4, and 56, no. 1 (1931-1932): 289-300, 15-32; Philip S. Klein, *President James Buchanan: A Biography* (Newtown, Conn.: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1962); Elbert B. Smith, *The Presidency of James Buchanan* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas,

By the time they first shared living quarters at a Washington boardinghouse in 1834, both men had long since become Democratic Party stalwarts. During the years in which they overlapped in the Senate (1834 to 1844), they offered unwavering support for Jacksonian projects, including most notably the Independent Treasury Bill. Both men came to believe in moderation on sectional issues and rejected abolitionism (Buchanan even laid the groundwork for the Senate's gag rule). After 1846, they supported the extension of slavery into the newly acquired western territories as a way to keep the peace. In foreign affairs, both men had turns in the Ministry to Russia, an assignment favored by crafty chief executives for removing political opponents from Washington. King got a second exodus with his two-year term as Minister to France under Presidents John Tyler and James Knox Polk, while Buchanan begrudgingly

1975); and Michael J. Birkner, "Introduction: Getting to Know James Buchanan, Again," in *James Buchanan and the Political Crisis of the 1850s*, ed. Michael J. Birkner (Selinsgrove, Penna.: Susquehanna Univ. Press, 1996), 17-36; Jean H. Baker, *James Buchanan* (New York: Times Books, 2004); and Thomas A. Horrocks, *President James Buchanan and the Crisis of National Leadership* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2012). Also useful is the extensive bibliography at the "James Buchanan Resource Center," available at <http://deila.dickinson.edu/buchanan>. On William Rufus DeVane King (who is commonly referred to as William Rufus King), the most important scholarly work remains John M. Martin, "William Rufus King: Southern Moderate" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1955); see also the series of articles published by Martin: "William R. King: Jacksonian Senator," *Alabama Review* (Oct. 1965): 243-67; "William R. King and the Compromise of 1850," *North Carolina Historical Review* (Oct. 1962): 500-18; "William R. King and the Vice Presidency," *Alabama Review* (Jan. 1963): 35-54; and "William Rufus King," in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, 6 vols., ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1988), 3:366-68. Also useful are B.F. Riley, "William R. King," in *Makers and Romance of Alabama History* (Birmingham, Ala., 1915), 23-27; Thomas M. Owen, ed., *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, 4 vols. (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Co., 1921), 3:983; Stoessel S. Barksdale, "Congressional Career of William Rufus King" (M.A. thesis, University of Alabama, 1933); Harriet Kilgore Chreitzberg, "Life of William Rufus King: A Study" (M.A. thesis, Winthrop College, 1933); Walter M. Jackson, *Alabama's First United States Vice-President William Rufus King* (Decatur, Ala.: Decatur Printing Co., 1952); Harriet K. Privett, "Vice President of the United States: William Rufus King" (Privately printed, 1960); Oscar B. King, *Our King Family: Their Ancestors In-Laws and Descendants* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Manney Co., 1970), 77-82; Reba S. Wilson and Betty S. Glover, *The Lees and Kings of Virginia and North Carolina, 1636--1976* (Ridgely, Tenn.: Wilson and Glover, 1975), 122-123; Henry P. Johnston, Sr., *William R. King and His Kin* (Birmingham, Ala.: Featon Press, 1975); Johnston, "William R. King; Speech Given Before the Alabama Historical Association" (Selma, Ala.: April 25 and 26, 1980), 1-17; Mark O. Hatfield, "Vice Presidents of the United States, 1789-1993: William Rufus King" (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), 181-87; Lewis O. Saum, "'Who Steals My Purse': The Denigration of William R. King, the Man for Whom King County Was Named," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 92, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 181-89; and Daniel F. Brooks, "The Faces of William R. King," *Alabama Heritage* 69 (Summer 2003): 14-23.

accepted an appointment as Minister to the Court of St. James during the administration of Franklin Pierce. Both men ultimately achieved the highest of executive offices: King the vice-presidency under Pierce in 1852 and Buchanan the presidency outright in 1856. One hundred years later—if they were remembered at all—historians would rank them among the worst ever to hold those offices.²

Messmates and constant companions for more than a decade, King and Buchanan sometimes attracted the critical attention of Washington contemporaries. Politicos, both those in power and those outside the circles of authority, attacked the pair in varying ways: for some, colorful metaphors allowed for the easy dismissal of a potential rival or future opponent, while for others, private insults could help solidify relationships with trusted correspondents. Yet, relatively few contemporaries gossiped about King and Buchanan: observers occasionally referred to King as “Aunt Nancy,” “Miss Fancy,” and Buchanan’s “wife.” The two men collectively may have been dubbed the “Siamese twins.” What is striking about the bits of gossip related to King and Buchanan is how very little has survived in the historical record. When compared to such figures as Thomas Jefferson or Andrew Jackson, the handful of phrases about King and Buchanan seems trifling. If either King or Buchanan were aware of the details of

² The rankings of Presidents of the United States, and by extension of Vice-Presidents, began with the poll conducted by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr. in 1948. Since then, countless polls have improved upon Schlesinger’s techniques, with the most highly rated poll today conducted by the Siena Research Institute of Siena College. Since 1948, not a single poll has ranked Buchanan above the fourth quartile. Presidential rankings have also produced a cottage industry of publications, none of which has ever been favorable to Buchanan. For accounts that stress Buchanan’s dismal performance in office, see, William J. Ridings, *Rating the Presidents: A Ranking of U.S. Leaders, From the Great and Honorable to the Dishonest and Incompetent* (Secaucus, N.J.: Carol Pub. Group, 1997); and Nathan Miller, *Star-Spangled Men America’s Ten Worst Presidents* (New York: Scribner, 1998). For a collective reevaluation of Buchanan, see John W. Quist and Michael J. Birkner, ed., *James Buchanan and the Coming of the Civil War* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2013).

the gossip about them, neither man seems to have taken notice. In fact, both men had long known the intimacy of male friendship to be a valuable asset in their political lives.³

In the first century of scholarship on the two men, historians all but glossed over this gossip and expended little effort to understand the meaning of their relationship. Even as biographers occasionally made mention of how contemporaries perceived the two men, the possibilities of such relationships little concerned the narratives constructed by older forms of political history. Since the introduction of gender and sexuality as legitimate categories of historical analysis, scholars have reconsidered the nature of Buchanan's various romantic attachments, and especially his relationship with King. The author John Updike first speculated

³ Historians have repeatedly, and always without definitive evidence, stated that contemporaries referred to King and Buchanan as "the Siamese twins." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first reference to the phrase appeared in 1829, when Robert Hunter brought the twins from Siam, Chang and Eng Bunker, to the attention of English-speaking audiences. In their adult lives, Chang and Eng both married women and produced children by their respective wives, which makes the usage of the phrase problematic as slang for two same-sex attracted men. Whether the phrase had taken on a more metaphorical meaning before King's death in 1853 is unclear [Jonathan Ned Katz uses the phrase to refer to Freud's binary of good and evil in the heterosexual and homosexual, respectively, but Katz does not offer examples in this or other works on the deployment of the phrase as slang for two same-sex attracted men]. Philip S. Klein briefly described the Congressional relationship of King and Buchanan and added, "Washington had begun to refer to them as 'the Siamese twins.'" In a footnote, Klein cited a letter from James Buchanan to Thomas Elder, dated November 7, 1836, but this letter does not contain a reference to the phrase. Possibly Klein had read the phrase in the work of Philip G. Auchampaugh, who commented on Buchanan and King's relationship: "In Washington circles Buchanan and King were called the Siamese Twins because they were so much together"; or elsewhere where he offered this description in a cryptic footnote about King: "Buchanan's 'Siamese Twin', United States Senator for Alabama." Unlike Klein, Auchampaugh only infrequently employed footnotes, and he offered no citation for the phrase. Perhaps, Auchampaugh himself first applied the phrase to describe them. On Cheng and Eng, see Amy Wallace, *The Two: The Story of the Original Siamese Twins* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978); on the "Siamese twins," see Jonathan N. Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York: Plume, 1995), 65; Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 111 and 442; Auchampaugh, "James Buchanan, the Squire from Lancaster," 29; and Philip G. Auchampaugh, "James Buchanan, the Bachelor of the White House: An Inquiry on the Subject of the Feminine Influence in the Life of Our Fifteenth President," *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 20 (Jan. 1939), 164fn8; and on "Aunt Nancy," see Judith S. Neaman and Caroline G. Silver, *The Wordsworth Book of Euphemism* (reprint; Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions, Ltd., 1995), 264-65. After Buchanan attained the Democratic Party nomination in 1856, on the other hand, he became a far greater target for lampooning by journalists and sketch artists alike. By the time of his departure in 1861, he was second perhaps only to Andrew Jackson in the number of highly negative depictions in political cartoons; see William Murrell, *A History of American Graphic Humor* 2 vols. (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1933), 1:142.

about a same-sex attraction and relationship in his 1992 novel *Memories of the Ford Administration*. Since then, numerous others have weighed in on the subject, to the point where it has become practically *de rigueur* to call King and Buchanan America's first gay vice-president and president, respectively.⁴

That the idea of a sexual relationship between King and Buchanan originated in the fertile ground of fiction may not surprise. Such a configuration goes beyond the limitations of the surviving evidence and into the realm of the queer imaginary. The possibility for "creative surmise" has allowed for a sense of connection to these two men who have mostly been forgotten as insignificant; therefore, to dismiss outright the opportunities of such queer readings serves little productive purpose. But to insist on such a relationship between King and Buchanan is more problematic still. To conceive of King and Buchanan as a gay couple essentializes past homosexuality and potentially distorts the evidence in the historical record, ignoring as it does

⁴ Although John Updike had pledged in *Buchanan Dying* (his major literary work on his fellow Pennsylvanian; see especially the still useful "Afterword") not to write again about Buchanan, he returned to the subject, including a highly speculative meditation on his relationship with King, in *Memories of the Ford Administration*. While King is variously a "beau ideal" and "a love object" of Buchanan's, Updike "finds little" in the way of "traces of homosexual passion"; Buchanan, he concludes, looked to King as an "older brother"; see Updike, *Buchanan Dying* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 183-262; Updike, *Memories of the Ford Administration* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), esp. 224-43, 314. Since Updike's novel, commentators have drawn more insistent conclusions, not only about their relationship but about the two men's sexual orientations more generally; see Nigel Cawthorne, *Sex Lives of the Presidents: An Irreverent Exposé of the Chief Executive from George Washington to the Present Day* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 91-95; James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (Norton: New York, 1999), 367-69; Baker, *James Buchanan*, 25-26; Milton Stern, *America's Bachelor President and the First Lady* (Baltimore: Publish America, 2004), 29-62; Larry Flynt and David Eisenbach, *One Nation Under Sex: How the Private Lives of Presidents, First Ladies and Their Lovers Changed the Course of American History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 49-54; Robert P. Watson, *Affairs of State: The Untold History of Presidential Love, Sex, and Scandal, 1789-1900* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 227-55. The Internet has also enabled an explosion in speculation (and misinformation) about James Buchanan and William Rufus King; for example, "Our Queer President," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Oct. 15, 1999; Timothy Cwiek, "James Buchanan: America's First Gay President?," <<https://www.washingtonblade.com/2011/10/04/james-buchanan-america%E2%80%99s-first-gay-president>>; and Chris White, "Question 15: So, uh... James Buchanan? (Part II)," <<http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/question-15-so-uh%E2%80%A6-james-buchanan-part-ii>>.

the analytical significance of gender dynamics. Although uncovering new evidence of same-sex attractions and relationships remains a laudable research goal, historians must also tread carefully in their renderings of same-sex sexuality in the early American past.⁵

This chapter offers a different interpretation. The relationship of William Rufus King and James Buchanan can be seen to follow relatively common patterns of intimate male friendship that proliferated during the Nineteenth Century. In this framework, intimate male friendships should be conceived as multi-faceted and variable, depending on factors of cultural background, race, and class. As noted, their relationship attracted gossip from various corners, the most salacious and sexualized of which was delivered in the coarse language of western Jacksonian Democrats. In turn, King and Buchanan gossiped amongst themselves—notably with various female family members and friends—in the refined diction of highly educated men from the East. Overall, this gossip can be understood, building on the work of previous historians, as

⁵ The earliest scholarship on same-sex intimacies emerged from the practitioners of women's history, beginning with Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's foundational 1975 article. Since that time, research in the areas of same-sex attractions and relationships in early America has been the work of historians of sex and sexuality, who have been variously categorized as "essentialist" or "social constructionist." Of major significance to the study of same-sex attractions among antebellum political figures, notably between James Henry Hammond and Thomas Jefferson Withers, has been the work of Martin Duberman, who reveals something of his research method when he writes, "Having exhausted the scanty historical data available for trying to construct a plausible context in which to read the erotic meaning of those letters, we can only fall back on *surmise* [emphasis mine]." Since the existing evidence on King and Buchanan does not allow a definitive assessment whether their relationship had a sexual component, or, for that matter, if either man was sexually attracted to the other, the following surmise must suffice: if anything, the one-sided nature of the surviving evidence suggests that King felt a deeper, longer, and greater attraction to Buchanan, who never reciprocated on the same level of intimate expression. That being said, Buchanan attempted many romantic courtships with woman (at least four), while King was never documented to have pursued any. Beyond a strict accounting of their sexual attractions, an assessment of the gendered nature of their intimacy, and the gossip surrounding it, may be more analytically useful. See Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relationships between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1 (1975): 1-29; a useful summary of the early origins and its future possibilities of the field of gay history is provided by John D'Emilio, "Afterword," in *Long Before Stonewall*, ed. Foster, 384-90; Martin B. Duberman, "'Writhing Bedfellows': 1826 Two Young Men From Antebellum South Carolina's Ruling Elite Share 'Extravagant Delight,'" *Journal of Homosexuality* 6, no. 1/2 (1981): 85-101; and Duberman, *About Time: Exploring the Gay Past; Revised and Expanded Edition* (New York: Plume, 1991), here 11.

gendered deployments in the “grammar of political combat” by different proponents of conflicting manhood.⁶

Yet, the grammar of political combat does not tell the whole the story. In their nearly twenty years of friendship, William Rufus King and James Buchanan shared a mess in Washington, traded dozens of letters, and intertwined their extended families with one another. In so doing, they also participated in an equally important “grammar of manhood,” in which the exigencies of a political agenda intersected with the private realm of thought and feeling. Their engagements with male intimacy tested the limits not only of their friendship, but of the possibilities for cross-sectional amity in an increasingly divided Democratic Party and country. Among the last practitioners of an older generation of national leaders, their relationship would shape the contours of national politics in the two decades before the Civil War.⁷

Forging of a Unionist

The year 1800 brought about a political revolution. Thomas Jefferson had been elected president, defeating John Adams in the bitterest contest to date for the nation’s top office. Jefferson’s election legitimated the nascent Democratic-Republicans; Adams’s defeat, in contrast, signaled the beginning of the end for the Federalist Party. All that remained in the future, however. In the ensuing decades of the early republic, a second generation of political leaders, born after the end of the American Revolution, was coming of age. This was the era of the “War Hawks” in Congress (Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, Richard Mentor Johnson, and William Lowndes among them), of “Mr. Madison’s War,” and the subsequent “Era of Good

⁶ The phrase “grammar of political combat” originated with Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*.

⁷ For the original application of the “grammar of manhood,” see Mark E. Kann, *A Republic of Men: The American Founders, Gendered Language, and Patriarchal Politics* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1998), esp. 1-4.

Feelings.” Also of great importance during this time was the boardinghouse fraternity as a factor in political culture and life in Washington. Both William Rufus King and James Buchanan would cut their political teeth in the homosocial world of the Washington boardinghouse.

In the first half of the Nineteenth Century, party loyalties routinely trumped sectional commitments, a schema that may safely be said to extend at least into the later 1840s. But somewhere between the high water mark of the Washington boardinghouse fraternities of the Early Republic and the firm entrenchment of sectional politics that defined the 1850s, there emerged a few unusual forms of politician, among them the southern compromiser and the northern dough-face. The “Great Compromiser” Henry Clay has often been depicted as a heroic figure, a Southerner who willingly sacrificed the interests of his section for the greater good of the Union. But Henry Clay was not the only southern compromiser. William Rufus DeVane King, a son of the North Carolina Piedmont and a later transplant to Alabama—the very heart of the new cotton frontier—was an equally moderating voice for the preservation of the Union. Even more unusual than his border state Whig colleague Clay and unlike John C. Calhoun, who traveled down the path of sectional politics in the 1830s, King consistently balanced the interests of his section and the Democratic Party with the permanent continuation of the Union. King’s continued pro-Union stance can be attributed to his commitment to Democratic principles, and arguably, to his close friendship with his Washington messmates, and in particular with James Buchanan.⁸

William Rufus King shared a similar trajectory to many southern born and raised men of his day. He first attended the Grove Academy in Kenansville, North Carolina, followed by a

⁸ In this context, see Rachel A. Shelden, “Not So Strange Bedfellows: Northern and Southern Whigs in the Texas Annexation Controversy, 1844-1845,” in *A Political Nation*, ed. Gallagher and Shelden, 11-35; and on the election of 1848 as a watershed moment for party politics, see Joel H. Silbey, *Party Over Section: The Rough and Ready Presidential Election of 1848* (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 2009).

stint at the Fayetteville Academy. Later, he joined his older brother Thomas DeVane King, class of 1802 at the University of North Carolina, at the nearby Preparatory School in Chapel Hill. In 1801, his first year enrolled as a student at the University of North Carolina, King and seven other classmates joined the Philanthropic Society, one of the two literary societies that reigned supreme over student life on the campus. In time, King held nearly every office, including those of corrector, councillor, supervisor, and president, a position that he held until his final days as a student in July 1804. King did not graduate from the institution; instead, he turned to the study of law under Judge William Duffy back in Fayetteville.⁹

King quickly thrived as a public man. A staunch Jeffersonian, King was first elected to serve a term in the state's House of Commons in 1808. The following year, King won election to the position of solicitor in the fifth circuit of the state superior court, which required constant travel around the Piedmont. In the following year, King's Sampson County neighbor Thomas Kenan declined to seek a fourth term as the district's representative to the House. Although not quite twenty-five, King made the decision to run as a Democratic-Republican. He was elected to the Congress in fall 1810, beating out a Federalist candidate. At age twenty-four, the native of Wilmington in rural Hanover County became the youngest man ever to serve in the House.¹⁰

⁹ For the record of King's activities at the University of North Carolina, see "Philanthropic Society Minutes," Vol. 3, Philanthropic Society Records, SHC; King's signature on a petition to the president, Minutes of General Faculty and Faculty Council, 1799-1814," 77-78; and Martin, "William Rufus King," 11-22. Of the group, John A. Thornton of Virginia appears to have been King's closest companion in the Society: both men were routinely fined for the same offenses, namely "irregularity" and "laughing." Three letters survive from later correspondence between King and the Society; see William R. King to Philanthropic Society, Oct. 10, 1837, April 4, 1838, and Sept. 29, 1851, Philanthropic Society Records, SHC; and also an excellent senior honors thesis, Joseph K.L. Reckford, "The Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies portraits, 1795-1868," (Senior honors thesis, Univ. of North Carolina, 1981). Among one of King's classmates in the Philanthropic Society was John H. Eaton, who later became Secretary of War under Andrew Jackson. King was not the only future officer of the executive branch to join a literary society at the university: James K. Polk was a member of the competing Dialectic Society and graduated at the top of his class in 1819.

¹⁰ Martin, "William Rufus King," 24-33.

When King entered the House in 1811, the most pressing matter of the day was the country's stormy relations with Great Britain. King immediately sided with the War Hawk faction in the Congress; he quickly formed a mess with several of them. Of the thirteen other representatives at Mr. Claxton's boardinghouse, eight joined King in voting for war with Britain in July 1812. Two years later, the ravages of war had taken their toll on the capital. When King returned for the third session of the Thirteenth Congress, the city was a charred remnant of its former self. With his options limited, King formed a mess with three other Southerners and Mr. Madison's vice-president, the elderly Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts. King later recalled that he had "enjoyed a long intimacy with [Gerry], and had derived much public knowledge from his long experience in public affairs." From Gerry, King absorbed strict republican tendencies and, perhaps, his lifelong adherence to the wearing of the powdered wigs fashionable in that era.¹¹

In the fall of 1816, King accepted an appointment as secretary of the Italian legation, under the auspices of the Federalist William Pinkney. Bouncing around Europe, King later became secretary to the Russian legation. By 1818, King had returned from Russia, where he joined his former congressional messmate, Israel Pickens, in seeking his fortune in the new territory of Alabama. In March 1819, King, his mother, grandmother, two brothers, five sisters, and dozens of slaves, headed westward into the heart of cotton country. Once there, he helped to

¹¹ In the second session of Twelfth Congress, King largely repeated this pattern for the second session of Congress, while during the first two sessions of the thirteenth Congress, King continued at Claxton's, along with fellow North Carolina representative Israel Pickens. King and Pickens again messed together in the first session of the next Congress. Like King, Israel Pickens would return in 1826 to Congress as a Jacksonian Senator from Alabama; however, the two men most likely did not mess together. On King's early messes, see Goldman, ed., *Congressional Directories*, 50-51, 53, 59, 61, 66-71, and 75; Martin, "William Rufus King," 33-49. For King's wartime vote, see *Annals of Congress*, 1637-38; for his comments on his relationship to Elbridge Gerry, see the statement from the proceedings of June 25, 1841, in the *Congressional Globe* X, 27th Cong., 1st Session, 119. On Gerry's term as vice-president, see also George A. Billias, *Elbridge Gerry: Founding Father and Republican Statesman* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), esp. 322-30; and Eugene F. Kramer, "The Public Career of Elbridge Gerry" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State Univ., 1955), esp. 177-78.

establish the Selma Land Company (King may even have given the new town its name). Along the banks of the Selma River, King established a vast cotton plantation, which he called King's Bend. As the financial beneficiary of the labor of enslaved blacks, King enjoyed the high prices and great demand for short-staple cotton. Unlike most of his fellow planters, however, King, now thirty-three years old, was primarily interested in politics and only secondarily in the fortunes available through the monoculture economy based on the production of cotton.¹²

During the summer of 1819, the former congressman made a strong impression on the delegates at the meeting of the constitutional convention in Huntsville, the state's first capital. Much as he had as a member of the House of Representatives, King preferred cordiality in his social relations during the convention. In his election to the U.S. Senate from the new state of Alabama in 1819, friendships with other men proved crucial. John Campbell, who served in the state constitutional convention and later became Treasurer of the United States, remembered King as having "very fine qualities" and being a "very gay elegant looking fellow." Like King, Campbell was also a bachelor; in a letter to his brother, he remarked that "[h]im and myself have become very intimate. He has some very fine qualities and I cannot but feel gratified in seeing him occupy any situation he wishes. He would do any thing in his power for me and I feel a correspondent disposition towards him." As compared to the state's other new U.S. senator—

¹² For an example of the ways in which migration affected kinship ties across the South, see Carolyn E. Billingsley, *Communities of Kinship: Antebellum Families and the Settlement of the Cotton Frontier* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2004). On King's role in the founding of Selma, see John Hardy, *Selma: Her Institutions and Her Men* (1879; Spartanburg, S.C.: Reprint Co., 1978), 8-10; and also, Alston Fitts, III, *Selma: Queen City of the Blackbelt* (Selma, Ala.: Clairmont Press, 1989), 1-22. The name Selma is derived from the poetry of "Ossian," whose work was supposedly collected and published by Scottish poet James Macpherson in 1760. In an historical irony, today Buchanan Lumber Mobile, Inc., owns the land.

John Williams Walker, whom Campbell found “amazingly *spoilt*”—intimate friendship was both personally appealing and politically expedient for King.¹³

The move to the Alabama frontier also brought new hostilities from men on the make. In 1831, King participated in an affair of honor with Michael Johnston Kenan, a member of a powerful North Carolina family also relocated to Alabama, and his second, John C. Perry, the former state treasurer. The originating cause of the affair remains unclear. The struggle appears to have centered on King’s support for John Murphy, the former two-term governor of Alabama, who was now seeking a term as representative from the state’s fifth congressional district. Partly because of King’s clever handling of the correspondence with his would-be combatants, the affair never fully blossomed into a duel, though challenges were made by both Kenan and Perry. Even after the incident, King remained closely aligned with Colonel Thomas S. Kenan, uncle to Michael Johnston Kenan.¹⁴

¹³ Martin, “William Rufus King,” 61; John Campbell to David Campbell, Aug. 11, 1819, Campbell Family Papers, box 4, DUL (n.b., both Watson, *Affairs of State*, 245, and Loewen, *Lies Across America*, 342, incorrectly attribute this quote to Buchanan). John Campbell appears to have been something of a gossip himself; see the various Campbell letters quoted in Malcolm C. McMillan, “The Alabama Constitution of 1819: A Study of Constitution-Making on the Frontier,” *Alabama Lawyer* 12 (Jan. 1951): 74-91, esp. 78.

¹⁴ Daniel F. Brooks, “The Faces of William R. King,” speculates that the “frivolous nature of the impending duel leads modern researchers to speculate that the conflict in question was tainted with the same gossip that was circulating in Washington” (18). Brooks draws his analysis from an 1872 history by Willis Brewer, a text notable for its many yarns and stories, and a source which cannot be fully trusted (after all, Brewer was born in 1844 and wrote his history in 1872). By contrast, William R. King himself described the struggle with Kenan as “entirely political” in a letter to John Coffee. A thorough account of the affair is given in Martin, “William Rufus King,” 99-103; see also the account of Bessie Hogan Williams, a descendant of the King family, in Johnston, *William R. King and His Kin*, 300, which remembers the cause of the affair to be a potent mixture of alcohol and politics. Other letters that support this view include William R. King to John Coffee, July 13, 1831, and Dec. 10, 1831, John Coffee Papers (microfilm, 6 reels, Montgomery: Alabama Department of Archives and History), reel 2; Albert B. Moore, *History of Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: Alabama Book Store, 1934), 169; Michael J. Kenan to William R. King, May 22 and May 26, 1831, *Alabama State Intelligencer* (Tuscaloosa); John C. Perry to William R. King, June 25 and June 28, 1831, *Huntsville Democrat*; Thomas DeVane King to William Taylor, July 12, 23, 30, and November 17, 1831, *Huntsville Democrat*; John Coffee to William Taylor, Aug. 31, 1831, *Huntsville Democrat*; and *ibid*, Oct. 29, 1831 and Dec. 3, 1831, *Alabama State Intelligencer*. Of interest, members of the Kenan family were prone to dueling: Michael Johnston Kenan, Jr., son of Michael

Although King observed affairs of honor with careful attention, he just as equally disdained the rituals of romantic courtship. He stumbled or froze up while in the company of women of polite society. During the high times of Dolley Madison's White House, the Pennsylvania representative Jonathan Roberts recalled an encounter with King: "I was crossed by Wm R. King, who pass'd a lady neither of us knew. I motioned to him to bring her on, but like an hauberk he said he did not know her." King never seems to have exhibited much interest in finding a wife, at least while residing in the United States. A legend still popular in Alabama maintains that during his time as part of the legation to Russia, a member of the royal family dazzled the young King. As a journalist later reported: "The young diplomat was much impressed with the dazzling beauty of the Czarina, and declared to a friend standing near that when his time came to pay his respects to her he intended to squeeze her hand as he kissed it ardently." The love was never requited, and to a King family descendant, the story demonstrated "one of the rare instances...in which...[King] showed even fleeting interest in the fair sex."¹⁵

The story of King's love for the Russian czarina resurfaced periodically during the remaining decades of his life. Such stories of love long lost were commonplace among lifelong bachelors, and they served a number of purposes for those who told them. Love stories functioned as a convenient trope for those who never married, as they permitted an easy explanation of their status to the society at large. For unmarried officeholders, these stories

Johnston Kenan, fought in a famous duel in West Point, Georgia, where he was killed. Both before and after the duel, King was close with Thomas S. Kenan: "I stopped in Washington to fraternise with our old Friends all of whom made particular inquiries after you, and spoke of you with a degree of kindness which showed the interest they take in your welfare...." William R. King to Thomas S. Kenan, Nov. 28, 1839, William Rufus King Papers, SHC. On John C. Perry, see also Owen, *History of Alabama Dictionary and Biography*, 4:1343.

¹⁵ Philip S. Klein, ed., "Memoirs of a Senator from Pennsylvania: Jonathan Roberts, 1771-1854," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 62, no. 2 (April 1938): 213-248, esp. 236, for the King anecdote. O.S. Wynn, "William Rufus King, Statesman, and Empire Builder," *Selma Times-Journal*, June 10, 1923; Johnston, "William R. King and His Kin," 69; and Martin, "William Rufus King," 59, also mentioned the story of King's attraction to the czarina.

served another, equally critical political function: to satisfy the demands of participation in the public sphere. Even as bachelors were more easily accepted and normalized in a man's local community, the wider public of nineteenth-century America fully expected to learn the personal biography of their political representatives, with marriage being an essential component of their inquiry (for example, James Buchanan's campaign literature in 1856 directly addressed the subject of his bachelorhood). Of course, these stories could also help to disguise same-sex attractions and erotic desires that were widely condemned by nineteenth-century American society. Regardless of which functions they served, as a recent historian of the subject has concluded, "Then as now Americans wondered about the bachelor and argued whether he was the embodiment of freedom or an example of immorality. But everyone accepted that the bachelor was an intrinsic part of society and agreed on the basic elements of his existence."¹⁶

Although William Rufus King came of an age when bachelors were increasingly gaining respect as legitimate members of American society, he could not avoid questions about his marital status from members of his own family. Of all his nieces and nephews, King held a particular concern for Catherine Margaret Parrish (her mother Catherine King Parrish, sister to William, had died at childbirth, leaving young Catherine in the care of relatives). Once an adult, Catherine Parrish married Harvey Ellis, a figure of some repute in Alabama politics until his unexpected death in 1842. As a widow, Catherine Parrish Ellis never again married. She instead devoted the next decade of her life to serving as hostess and traveling companion to her uncle William. As a sign of his affection, King often addressed her as "Dear Daughter" in his letters. In return, the widowed Ellis pushed her elderly uncle to marry. In one notable reply, King

¹⁶ For bachelorhood in the earlier period, see Kann, *Republic of Men*, esp. 52-62; and for the changes in the perception of bachelorhood by mid-century, see John G. McCurdy, *Citizen Bachelors: Manhood and the Creation of the United States* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2009), 200. Same-sex unions among women could often be accepted locally; for example, see Rachel H. Cleves, *Charity and Sylvia: A Same-Sex Marriage in Early America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014).

evaded the topic of marriage through self-effacement, calling himself an “Old Bachelor” and adding, “When I see you, we will discuss the important subject of marriage to which you have called my attention; I will only say that I see but little prospect of giving you an aunt very shortly.” Of course, King never married and Ellis seems to have quietly dropped the subject in her future correspondence.¹⁷

While William Rufus King could find relative safety in his bachelor status, he was not immune to criticism of the gendered performance of his refined, even effeminate, manhood. Considered by Caleb Cushing to be a “frivolous Jesuit” and Martin Van Buren to be a “man of colder temperament,” King often baffled his fellow politicians. John Randolph of Roanoke, Virginia, who was legendary for his wagging tongue and outlandish behavior on the floor of the House of Representatives (and himself a fellow bachelor), purportedly once responded to a woman’s inquiry about King’s character with the startled reply: “Mr. King? Why madam, Mr. King is—is—in fact Madam, Mr. King wears the handsomest pair of boots in Washington.” While Randolph’s stumbling remark about King’s boots may simply be a case of resentment caused by overfamiliarity or mere jealousy, the gendered terms of the attack reveal the intimate nature of political contest in early nineteenth-century America. Indeed, King was by all accounts strikingly vain—a contemporary publication described him as a “old gentleman, a bachelor, who wears a prim wig, and is precise in his manners, as well as his notions of legislation”—but Randolph’s decision to attack this quality, rather than his political views, suggests how political men constituted their relations along the most personal of lines. Also of interest in Randolph’s reply is that it was uttered to a woman, as opposed to another man. In the construction of manhood, and most especially in its oppositional quality through contests with other men,

¹⁷ On Harvey W. Ellis, see William Garrett, *Reminiscences of Public Men in Alabama* (Atlanta: Plantation Publishing, 1872), 210-11. William R. King to Catherine Parrish Ellis, Dec. 12, 1843 and March 15, 1844, William Rufus King Papers, box 1, folder 3, ADAH.

women served as critical interlocutors, and sometimes as triangulated objects of erotic desire between men, for male friendship, and by extension, for political decision-making and the everyday practice of politics in such domestic spaces as the Washington mess.¹⁸

His bachelor status did not take away from King's political efficacy. As a senator from the southwestern frontier, King focused his energies on bills that addressed the sale of public lands—he eventually became chairman of the Senate Public Lands Committee—the increase on duties related to manufactured goods in various tariff proposals, and the purchase of additional lands from native tribes in the newly admitted southeastern states. By 1828, King, along with most of Alabama, stood strongly in favor of the election of Andrew Jackson, a man with whom he had become personally acquainted during the Seminoles War of 1816-1817 (from which he earned the military title of Colonel). As a Jacksonian senator, King warned against the dangers of nullification, yet he did not condone the president's Force Bill in 1833. Although he would later near come to blows with Henry Clay on the floor of the Senate, King worked with Clay on this occasion to support a compromise to end the nullification crisis in 1833. On the whole, King was charting a path for moderate Unionism in the southern wing of the Democratic Party.¹⁹

¹⁸ Caleb Cushing, "Biographical Sketch of William R. King, ca. 1834," box 201, folder 9, Caleb Cushing Papers, LC; Martin Van Buren, *Autobiography of Martin Van Buren*, 2 vols., ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920), 2:724; the account of Randolph's reaction to King comes from the *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, June 11, 1852; and for the description of King, see "Letters from Washington—No. 19" for the *Puritan Recorder*, June 12, 1852, enclosed in David Hitchcock to Caleb Cushing, June 18, 1852, Cushing Papers, box 61, folder 10, LC. See also the memorable characterizations of King in Roy F. Nichols, *The Democratic Machine, 1850-1854* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1923), 54 and 144. Of course, the blade cut both ways: James Buchanan once disdainfully called Randolph's voice "effeminate" in a letter to a friend; see James Buchanan to Walter Franklin, Dec. 21, 1821, James Buchanan Papers, box 45, folder 2, HSP; and on Randolph's own eccentric qualities, see David Johnson, *John Randolph of Roanoke* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2012), esp. 26-30. On the valences of women triangulated "between men," see Eve K. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985). A similar logic applies to the eighteenth-century example of same-sex attractions and erotic desires in the triad of Leander, Castalio, and Lorenzo; see Godbeer, *Overflowing of Friendship*, esp. 17-48.

¹⁹ Martin, "William Rufus King," 61-140.

During the fifteen-year stretch in the Senate from 1819 to 1834, King forged a number of significant political allegiances. Many of these corresponded with his various residences in Washington messes, including other senators from Alabama, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, and Maryland. But King and his southern messmates also accepted members from the North and West, including representatives from far-away Maine, Missouri, and Illinois. By the time of the tumultuous partisanship of the 1820s, the primary qualification for a potential messmate was that he be a steadfast Jacksonian Democrat. After the divisive events of 1833, however, one's loyalty to Andrew Jackson became an even more polarizing issue. Suddenly, a new anti-Jacksonian party, which would eventually be organized under the name Whigs, sprang into life. When the North Carolina senator William P. Mangum turned from a Jacksonian Democrat to an anti-Jacksonian, King promptly ended his mess with the man, replacing him with the other senator from North Carolina, Bedford Brown. Another messmate, the Tennessee representative John Bell, likewise transformed himself from a Jacksonian to a rabid anti-Jacksonian. These political defections forced King and Brown to find new messmates whose Jacksonian principles were unwavering and, just as importantly, whose personal qualities made them congenial social companions. They first pulled in Edward Lucas of western Virginia, a new representative who had lodged at Brown's Hotel in the previous session. Finally, they turned to the new junior senator from Pennsylvania, James Buchanan.²⁰

²⁰ King first stayed at Mr. Dowson's mess with his fellow Alabama senator John W. Walker and a mix of Northerners and other Southerners. King resided at Dowson's through the next two sessions of Congress. His messmates increasingly became southern in character, and by 1825, he was living exclusively with other men from his section. Through the next five years, King lived only with other Southerners, moving from Dowson's to Mr. Coyle in 1829, to Mrs. Arguelles in 1830, back to Dowson's in 1831, Arugelles again in 1831, and Miss Polk's in 1833 for the twenty-third Congress. See Martin, "William Rufus King," 63-70; Goldman, ed., *Congressional Directories*, 108, 116, 127, 158, 169, 183, 194, 206, 217, 228, 241, 253, 268, and 281; and Willie P. Mangum to Joseph Gales, Jr., Dec. 17, 1831, in *Papers of Willie Person Mangum*, 5 vols., ed. Henry T. Shanks (Raleigh, N.C.: State Dept. of Archives and History, 1950-1956), 1:428.

Leavening of a Dough-face

Along with Franklin Pierce and Stephen Douglas, James Buchanan has often been offered as the example par excellence of the dough-face—a denigrating term for a Northerner who sacrificed the interests of his section in favor of those of the South. The dough-face relationship was often criticized as one between southern masters and northern slaves. How exactly did Buchanan become a dough-face? There can be no doubting that his intimate friendship with William Rufus King and his many southern Washington messmates played a leading part. Yet, to say that King turned Buchanan into a dough-face overly simplifies matters, for Buchanan’s cultural upbringing in Lancaster, his early congressional career, and his commitment to the party of Jackson all suggest that had already started down the road of southern sympathizer. But, through their friendship and their shared Washington mess with other southern Democrats, King and his fellow Southerners leavened Buchanan’s dough-face leanings into hardened form.²¹

Born at Cove Gap in 1791, James Buchanan was a child of the Pennsylvania’s western frontier. Buchanan was unique among the northern dough-faces in that his family had once owned slaves. In his childhood, an enslaved woman named Hannah had nursed the young boy. James Buchanan’s father, also named James Buchanan, had even purchased acreage in Kentucky, though no Buchanan son would ever establish himself so far to the west. The younger James Buchanan attained his first formal schooling at the Old Stone Academy in Mercersburg, a quaint hamlet just north of the Mason-Dixon line. To continue his education, Buchanan headed

²¹ John Randolph first coined the term around the Missouri Compromise, and given his later distaste for both King and Buchanan, it is fitting that Buchanan would later be seen as a dough-face. There are two recent studies that argue for James Buchanan as dough-face: Nicholas P. Cox, “The Origin and Exhaustion of the Doughfaces: Three Profiles of Martin Van Buren, Michael Walsh, and James Buchanan” (M.A. thesis, Univ. of Houston, 2007), esp. 85-123; and Joshua Lynn, “Half-Baked Men: Doughface Masculinity and the Antebellum Politics of the Household” (M.A. thesis, Univ. of North Carolina, 2010), esp. 35-52.

east to Dickinson College in Carlisle, an institution notable for its mix of Northerners and Southerners: for example, the future Supreme Court Chief Justice, Roger Taney of Maryland, had graduated in 1795 as class valedictorian. When James Buchanan enrolled in 1805, he found the college in a “wretched condition” with “no efficient discipline.” By the fall of 1808, Buchanan had been expelled for “bad behavior,” possibly for violations of the school’s rules on the consumption of alcohol. Buchanan promised to remain on good behavior to the trustee John King, who readmitted him. When Buchanan was denied the top prize awarded to graduating seniors, he felt slighted and left discontented (though he was permitted to speak at graduation, regardless). “I left college,” he later remembered, “feeling little attachment to the Alma Mater.”²²

As a young man starting out in the world, Buchanan shared a strikingly similar trajectory to his future messmate William Rufus King. Buchanan pursued the study of law under the tutelage of Judge James Hopkins in Lancaster. Once established with his own legal practice in 1812, Buchanan quickly busied himself with public affairs. In the fall of 1814, he served in Henry Shippen’s impromptu militia, marching to Baltimore long after the fighting had ended at

²² Useful information on Buchanan’s family may be found in the “Autobiographical Sketch, 1791-1828,” in *Works of James Buchanan*, ed. Moore, 12:289-315. Ever politically crafty on the slavery question, Buchanan criticized the Democratic-Republican gubernatorial candidate William Findlay in 1820 for owning the same Hannah, a quite unfair move given that Buchanan himself had sold her to Findlay. Buchanan also engaged in the manumission of two enslaved persons owned by his sister Harriet Buchanan and her husband Robert Henry of Virginia. In 1835, James Buchanan purchased Daphne Cook, age twenty-two, and her daughter Ann Cook, age five. Perhaps as a way to avoid the embarrassment of a family member owning slaves, Buchanan arranged to indenture Daphne and Ann Cook under the gradual emancipation laws of Pennsylvania. As an added benefit to Buchanan, the Cooks performed household work at his Lancaster home. Buchanan’s early association with enslaved African Americans and his subsequent association with southern enslavers likely assuaged his concerns over this arrangement; see Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 35. Also useful on Buchanan’s attitude toward slavery is Donald V. Weatherman, “James Buchanan on Slavery and Secession,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 15 (Fall 1985): 796-805. In later life, none of Buchanan’s orphaned wards attended Dickinson. Buchanan himself preferred to devote time instead to the newly formed Franklin College; see Philip S. Klein, “James Buchanan at Dickinson College,” in *John and Mary’s College* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1956): 157-180; Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 5, 9-11, and Milton Stern, *Harriet Lane: America’s First Lady* (LuLu Press, 2005), 8.

Fort McHenry (unlike King, Buchanan never used his military rank in later life). Buchanan was also nominated and elected to the Pennsylvania State Assembly seat from Lancaster. As with many future aspirants to the public's acclaim, a patriotic oration marked the true beginning of his career as a politician. On the occasion of a speech given on July 4, 1815, Buchanan declared himself a Federalist and an opponent of the war with Britain. Only a return to "Washingtonian policy," he declared could bring the country back to the right spirit of the Revolution. For the next five years, Buchanan returned to the practice of law, content to leave state politics behind.²³

During these years in Lancaster, James Buchanan might have been the town's most eligible bachelor. He had earned a degree, though barely, from Dickinson College, served in the Pennsylvania militia during the War of 1812, and established a prosperous law practice in Lancaster. In partnership with John Passmore, whom Buchanan's principle biographer memorably described as the "town's jovial 400-pound prothonotary," he bought a home. In December 1816, Buchanan became a member of Free and Accepted Masons, through his membership in Lancaster's prominent Masonic Lodge (no. 43). Buchanan eventually became Junior Warden in 1820, Worshipful Master in 1822, and the First District Deputy Grand Master in 1823. In this Masonic affiliation, Buchanan also shared a connection with William Rufus King.²⁴

²³ James Buchanan, "Fourth of July Oration," in *Works of James Buchanan*, ed. Moore, 1:9; Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 16-22; 35-37.

²⁴ Klein, *James Buchanan*, 16. Passmore was also described as "Lancaster's amiable 450-pound prothonotary and town character," in Klein, Philip S. Klein, "James Buchanan and Ann Coleman," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 59, no. 1 (1955): 1-20, quote on 10 (incidentally, Ann Coleman's first name is variously spelled with and without the final "e"). On Buchanan's Fourth of July speech, see Auchampaugh, "Squire of Lancaster," 289-312; William Frederic Wormer, "The Washington Association of Lancaster," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 35 (1931): 146-49. On Buchanan's Masonic connections, see also "The Pennsylvania Freemason" (Feb. 1991) and "A Souvenir of the Exhibition: James Buchanan—President Freemason," James Buchanan Papers, box 3, folder 67, LCHS. King's Masonic connections may be inferred from his listing in the "Catalogue of the Officers and Pupils of the Central Masonic Institute," Selma, Alabama, 1851, in the collection of the Vaughan-Smitherman Museum, Selma, Alabama.

Despite these qualifications, Buchanan never married, though, and unlike King, not for lack of trying. Through his law partner, Buchanan became aware of Ann Coleman, the daughter of the iron magnate, Robert Coleman, patriarch of a wealthy Lancaster family. Buchanan subsequently called upon Coleman, who at twenty-three was nearly beyond the age of marriage. The two eventually became engaged in 1819. When Buchanan neglected his betrothed in favor of business affairs later that fall, Coleman decided to break the engagement. Not long after, she visited Philadelphia and there died of “hysterical convulsions,” according to her physician’s report. Rumors circulated then and since that Coleman had committed suicide, though these are unsubstantiated. Buchanan was badly broken up by Coleman’s death and wrote a touching note to her father, which was either returned without having been read or never sent at all. Although he would unsuccessfully pursue many women in the years ahead, Ann Coleman’s death provided James Buchanan with crucial fodder to explain his subsequent bachelorhood.²⁵

The Federalist Party, though moribund on the national level, still operated with powerful effect in certain districts of Pennsylvania, Lancaster among them. The Federalists chose

²⁵ For the best account of the courtship of Ann Coleman, see Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 27-33. The tragedy of Ann Coleman also produced the only documented instance in which a portion of the personal papers of James Buchanan was purposely destroyed; see Curtis, *Life of James Buchanan*, 1:20-21; and the account of Buchanan’s death and subsequent dispute over his estate in John R. Irelan, *The Republic; or, a History of the United States of America in the Administrations, From the Monarchic Colonial Days to the Present Times*, 18 vols. (Chicago: Fairbanks and Palmer, 1888), 15:644-58. Other documented incidents of attempted courtship include with Mary Snyder (the niece of Thomas Kittera), Joanna Lucinda Rucker (the niece of Sarah Childress Polk), Anna Payne (the niece of Dolley Payne Madison), one Miss Jane of Harrisburg, and Eliza Watterston (son of George Watterston, the Librarian of Congress). On these courtships, see variously, James Buchanan to Eliza Violet Gist Blair, June 3, 1837, James Buchanan Papers, box 46, folder 2, HSP; James Buchanan to Thomas Kittera, Oct. 9, 1834, Sept. 25, 1837, and April 25, 1843, James Buchanan Family Papers, LCHS (these and other documents were previously accessioned as the Agnes Sellin Schoch Collection of Buchanan-Kittera Manuscripts, Buchanan Foundation for the Preservation of Wheatland); Joanna Lucinda Rucker to Elizabeth C. Price, Oct. 17, 1845, typescript, James K. Polk Papers, 1815-1949, box 1, folder 6, TSLA; James Buchanan to Eliza Violet Gist Blair, May 15, 1839, Blair and Lee Family Papers, box 42, folder 5, PUL; poem dated Mar. 18, 1842, James Buchanan Papers, HSP; James Buchanan to Mrs. Jesse Miller, April 10, 1846, Shapell Manuscript Collection; James Buchanan to Eliza Watterston, Nov. 17, 1851 and Nov. 18, 1852, James Buchanan and Harriet Lane Johnston Papers, box 5, LC; and James Buchanan to Eliza Watterston, May 5, 1853, privately held.

Buchanan to represent them in the congressional election of 1820, which he won handily. He entered the House in 1821 as a freshman member of a mostly ineffectual minority party. As both a freshman representative and an avowed Federalist, Buchanan possessed few allies with whom he might mess. He found quarters at Miss Heyer's boardinghouse on Capitol Hill, joining with three other members of the Pennsylvania delegation, one from Maryland, and another from Massachusetts, all of whom were outright Federalists or allied with that party. But as the Federalist Party spiraled into its final demise, Buchanan struggled to find a suitable boardinghouse. Ultimately, he would settle upon the unusual arrangement of forming a mess with two nominal Democratic-Republicans from South Carolina, Andrew R. Govan and George McDuffie.²⁶

The early connection of these South Carolina politicians to Buchanan is notable in light of his later intimate friendship with William Rufus King. What attracted Buchanan to form a mess with these southern men? Of course, the primary consideration in Buchanan's association with Govan and McDuffie was their Federalist Party affiliation, quite unusual by the decade of the 1820s (South Carolina and Pennsylvania were among the last states to send Federalists representatives to the House of Representatives). Yet, as with so many of his most important friendships with southern men, the answer is a mixture of the personal and the political. The two South Carolinians were roughly the same age as Buchanan (born in the 1790s), and both men were also bachelors (though both would later marry). Since he had entered Congress, George McDuffie, who hailed from the rough and tumble Edgefield district, had distinguished himself nationally in a series of "notorious" duels with William Cummings. McDuffie's notoriety may

²⁶ Buchanan was joined not only by Govan and McDuffie, but also by two Massachusetts men, the Federalist Representative Henry D. Dwight and George Blake (a friend of Daniel Webster); see Goldman, ed., *Congressional Directories*, 127, 139-140; George McDuffie to James Buchanan, Mar. 28, 1823, James Buchanan Papers, box 1, folder 3, HSP; and James Buchanan to "Dear Madam" [ca. 1822], James Buchanan Papers, box 45, folder 2, HSP.

have made an impression upon the young Buchanan, as might McDuffie's personality, which carried a reputation for its "taciturnity and reserve." The performance of chivalric manhood and attention to honor given by members of the South Carolina planter class may also have appealed to the young squire from Lancaster. In addition to their shared political views, then, the espousal of certain qualities of manhood sealed together this inaugural friendship between James Buchanan and southern politicians.²⁷

Older Federalists, the most notable of which was another South Carolina man William Lowndes, the presumed successor to President Monroe, also influenced the young Buchanan to an unusual degree. Buchanan deeply respected Lowndes, who was a decade older and carried much political weight nationally. Writing nearly fifty years later, an elderly Buchanan recalled of Lowndes: "His eloquence partook of his own gentle and unpretending nature." In his "social intercourse," Buchanan recalled, "he was ever ready and willing to impart his stores of information on any subject...." From Lowndes, Buchanan gained his first opportunity to speak before Congress on the question of the War Department's expenditures. Buchanan even adopted many of the rhetorical strategies—what one scholar has called the "Lowndes formula"—including the appearance of impartiality and non-partisanship, extensive knowledge of the subject under debate, and unassailable logic in the presentation of argument.²⁸

²⁷ A commentator later observed that McDuffie "literally seemed to commune with himself." Two biographies of McDuffie are helpful: Edwin L. Green, *George McDuffie* (Columbia, S.C.: State Company, 1936), esp., 27-36; and Bobby F. Edmonds, *George McDuffie: Southern Orator* (McCormick, S.C.: Cedar Hill, 2007), esp. 24-33. The quotes about McDuffie are found in John B. O'Neill, *Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina*, 2 vols. (Charleston, S.C.: S. G. Courtenay, 1859), 2:463-468.

²⁸ On Buchanan's relation to Lowndes, see James Buchanan, "Autobiographical Sketch," in *Works of James Buchanan*, ed. Moore, 12:310-11; Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 38-39; Carl J. Vipperman, *William Lowndes and the Transition of Southern Politics* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1989), 252-64; and for the "Lowndes formula," see John A. Campbell, Jr., "James Buchanan: Advocate in Congress, Cabinet, and Presidency" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Florida, 1968), esp. 52-91.

With Lowndes's untimely death in 1822, Buchanan became a firm supporter of John C. Calhoun for the presidency, a move spurred on by his messmate McDuffie. In his correspondence with McDuffie, Buchanan engaged in his first attempt at presidential matchmaking, having been advised that the "safest course" was to support Calhoun. As events would have it, Calhoun's candidacy for president faltered, leaving him the second spot under whoever of the four "favorite sons" was selected in 1824. In the next term, Buchanan had declared himself a Democratic-Republican and a supporter of Andrew Jackson (he had previously hedged his bets with the half-way appellation "Federal-Republican"). His attempt to reconcile Jackson and Adams supporters into a single camp failed—in fact, his strategy completely backfired, leaving Jackson with a lingering resentment toward the Pennsylvanian. Nevertheless, Buchanan had hitched his political wagon to the powerful star that was Andrew Jackson, and, perhaps more importantly, he had begun the process of aligning himself as an ally to the powerful southern wing of the new Democratic Party.²⁹

With his Jacksonian principles and personal credentials established, James Buchanan continued along a political course in the House through the remainder of the 1820s. He likewise shifted the composition of his mess and securely aligned himself with representatives from his region and his new party, a situation that led Buchanan to mess with numerous representatives from the slave-holding states. These same representatives often brought enslaved people to attend to them while away in Washington, itself a city built on the backs of slaves. The arrangement likely did not trouble Buchanan; for although he hailed from free Pennsylvania, Lancaster was a short distance from the slave-based plantation economy of Maryland. More important to Buchanan than whether potential messmates held slaves or not was their interest in

²⁹ George McDuffie to James Buchanan, Mar. 28, 1823, James Buchanan Papers, box 1, folder 3, HSP; Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 50-53.

the consumption of alcohol. In a pattern that he would repeat with future messmates, Buchanan intertwined his personal affairs with other members of the mess and made arrangements for the delivery of large quantities of wine to their boardinghouse. Always well provisioned with such liquid necessities, the boardinghouse life more often than not pleased the young congressman. To his Lancaster confidant William Norris, Buchanan reported on Christmas Eve 1829: "I am very comfortably situated at an excellent boarding house in that part of the city which I prefer."³⁰

The comfortable pleasures of the Washington mess would soon be taken from him. President Andrew Jackson still did not trust (or for that matter, very much like) Buchanan, and in 1832, he appointed Buchanan the country's Minister to Russia. Buchanan stoically bore the two years of political exile, ever a keen observer of the social obligations required of him by the court at St. Petersburg and of the customs of the Russian people more generally (and he also made the acquaintance of several Americans abroad, including Henry Wheaton, future Minister to Berlin). Upon his return to the United States in 1834, Buchanan was elected to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Senator William Wilkins. As he felt "too young to be without employment," Buchanan gladly accepted the position. The new senator took his seat on December 15, 1834, where he joined three southern Jacksonian Democrats—William Rufus King, Bedford Brown, and Edward Lucas—at Saunders' boardinghouse mess on E Street. Of the group, only one man was married (Brown), with the other three (King, Lucas, and Buchanan) being hitherto lifelong

³⁰ Goldman, ed., *Congressional Directories*, 170, 184, 195, 206, & 281; James Buchanan to William Norris, Dec. 24, 1829, James Buchanan Papers, box 52, folder 28, HSP. On the connection of Washington to slavery, see Damani Davis, "Slavery and Emancipation in the Nation's Capital: Using Federal Records to Explore the Lives of African American Ancestors," *Prologue* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 52-59; and various contributions in Paul Finkelman and Donald R. Kennon, ed., *In the Shadow of Freedom: The Politics of Slavery in the National Capital*, (Athens: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2011); and Mary Beth Corrigan, "The Ties That Bind: The Pursuit of Community and Freedom Among Slaves and Free Blacks in the District of Columbia, 1800-1860," in *Southern City, National Ambition: The Growth of Early Washington, D.C., 1800-1860*, ed. Howard Gillette, Jr. (Washington: American Architectural Foundation, 1995): 69-90. Slavery remained legal in Washington until April 16, 1862. On the wine delivery, see Buchanan to George B. Porter, Jan. 22, 1829, James Buchanan Papers, N-YHS.

bachelors. This group comprised of mostly middle-aged bachelors would influence the course of national politics in the decades ahead.³¹

The Bachelor's Mess

Bachelors were not entirely uncommon in antebellum America. But for public men at the nation's capital, the condition was more unusual than not. Besides the usual societal pressures to marry, the many social occasions required of a public man and his exposure to the ladies of high society attracted large numbers of women of marriageable age to the bachelor in antebellum Washington. Marriage of this sort was understood to be of great political benefit, too. The wife of an antebellum politician aided her husband in uncountable ways, from the more traditional management of the household to the arrangement of social gatherings for her husband's political friends and their respective families. The famous example of Dolley Madison (and her continued residence in the capital for the remainder of her life) reminded the unmarried politician of the immense practical advantages of a socially adept and politically active wife.³²

³¹ In Russia, Buchanan continued to enjoy the company of other men. In his diary of June 18, 1833, he described an encounter with a Russian Orthodox monk, Father Antoine: "Upon taking leave of Antoine, I submitted to be kissed by him according to the Russian fashion, first on the right cheek, then on the left, and then on the mouth. This was my first regular experiment of the kind." In subsequent letters, he repeated the details of the encounter at some length. Although some historians make much of these descriptions, Buchanan himself thought the encounter to be so much "bagatelle" in a letter to the former Delaware County congressman and canal builder George G. Leiper; Moore, ed., *Works of James Buchanan*, 2:363; Watson, *Affairs of State*, 250; James Buchanan to George G. Leiper, July 3, 1833, in *ibid*, 2:367. Of his time with Wheaton, Buchanan remembered their "social intercourse at Hamburg as one of the greenest spots of my pilgrimage"; see James Buchanan to Henry Wheaton, Aug. 3, 1836, Wheaton Collection, American Literary and Historical Manuscripts, PML; and James Buchanan to Mahlon Dickerson, Oct. 24, 1834, Mahlon Dickerson and Philemon Dickerson Papers, box 1, folder 2, NJHS.

³² On bachelorhood in the early part of the Nineteenth Century, two studies are helpful; see McCurdy, *Citizen Bachelors*, esp. 198-200; and Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), esp. 21-44. On Dolley Madison's role in the success of her husband's political career, see Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, esp. 48-101; and for a more sustained treatment, Allgor, *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2006).

The record is unclear how the bachelor James Buchanan came to share living quarters with William Rufus King, Bedford Brown, and Edward Lucas. Neither had he previously boarded with any one of the three men, nor had he before lodged at Saunders' boardinghouse. From his years in the House, Buchanan might have known King, who had served in the Senate chamber across the hall. Perhaps, too, the two men had met during their overlap in Washington during the 1820s, at one of the many formal receptions given at the president's house by Elizabeth Kortright Monroe, or at a ball arranged by Louisa Catherine Adams. However, the most likely connection of the three men to Buchanan was Edward Lucas, who was a fellow graduate of Dickinson College class of 1809, and likely already a friend to Buchanan (Lucas would eventually name his second son James Buchanan Lucas, born 1848, in honor of his former classmate and messmate). When this personal connection combined with Buchanan's commitment to the party of Jackson, the new senator from Pennsylvania became a likely candidate for inclusion in their mess.³³

The arrangement at Saunder's did not outlast the short session. For the upcoming session of Congress, Buchanan attempted to form a mess with the Democratic senator Garret Dorset Wall of New Jersey, who was, it should be noted, married. Apparently, Buchanan considered Wall to be among his most intimate friends. "With the exception of Col. King," Buchanan recounted years later to Wall's son, "I never was in terms of more intimate personal & political association with any friend than with your excellent father." But Buchanan hit an early stumbling block in continuing this intimacy with Wall. In a letter dated November 1835, he reported that he had received a letter from fellow bachelor John Pendleton King of Georgia

³³ On the numerous balls held during the presidency of John Quincy Adams, see Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, esp. 147-189. On Edward Lucas, see Frederica H. Trapnell, "Some Lucases of Jefferson County," *Magazine of Jefferson County Historical Society* 60 (Dec. 1994): 17-34, esp. 27-28, as well as the letters exchanged with his brother, William Lucas, who also served in the Congress as a representative from Virginia, in the Edward Lucas Papers, DUL.

“urging me to unite with King of Alabama, Brown of N. Carolina, & himself in forming a mess.” Such was not Buchanan’s desire, he ruefully admitted to Wall: “The truth is I had wished to form such a mess & to include yourself; but I could not bring them to act specifically on the subject.” In the same letter, Senator Buchanan further outlined his reasons for forming a smaller mess, making reference to his early years in the House: “I cannot live in a large mess & would reluctantly go into one where there were members of the House.” To start his time in the Senate, then, Buchanan did not consciously choose the company of other unmarried men, nor does forming a mess on the basis of bachelorhood appear to have been under active consideration.³⁴

By the start of the next session, however, William Rufus King and James Buchanan were fast on their way to becoming close political associates and intimate friends alike. In the earliest surviving letter between the two men from October 1836, King discussed the prospects of the “Republican Party” in the South. “Van Buren will get the vote of this State,” King correctly predicted. The letter also concerned the question of mess arrangements for the upcoming session of Congress, with King asking Buchanan to “oblige me by securing a residence for *us*.” One month later, Buchanan wrote to his Lancaster confidant Thomas Elder with the news: “I have engaged to take lodgings for Mr. King the President pro tempore of the Senate & myself.” Apparently, William Rufus King’s plea for a “residence for *us*” had succeeded.³⁵

³⁴ After much indecision on Buchanan’s part, Wall settled on messing with Bedford Brown, Samuel Beardsley of New York, and James Parker of New Jersey, while William R. King and Edward Lucas continued at Saunders’ boardinghouse and Buchanan resigned himself to live in a private residence under the care of Mrs. Miller on F Street. For Buchanan’s comparison of King and Wall, see James Buchanan to James W. Wall, Jan. 16, 1863, James Buchanan Papers, box 52, folder 2, HSP; for a similar comment, see also Buchanan to James W. Wall, July 14, 1860, *ibid.*, box 51, folder 17. For the correspondence between Buchanan and Wall, see Garret D. Wall to James Buchanan July 27, 1835, and Sept. 23, 1835, James Buchanan Papers, box 3, folder 18, HSP; James Buchanan to Garret D. Wall, Nov. 19, 1835, *ibid.*, box 52, folder 30, HSP; Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 100-104; Goldman, ed., *Congressional Directories*, 290-94.

³⁵ William R. King to James Buchanan, Oct. 5, 1836, James Buchanan Papers, box 4, folder 9, HSP; James Buchanan to Thomas Elder, Nov. 7, 1836, *ibid.*, box 45, folder 6, HSP.

The shared Washington mess of James Buchanan and William Rufus King included other political men as well. These men near universally shared one unusual commonality for antebellum politicians: they were not married. Between 1836 and 1841, the evidence suggests, Buchanan and King formed a variety of messes with other unmarried men (primarily bachelors, but also one widower). Some of these messmates were known associates, while others were entirely new. First, Edward Lucas of Virginia, a fellow bachelor messmate from earlier sessions of Congress, joined their mess. Next came the bachelor senator Robert Carter Nicholas, a sugar planter from Terrebone Parish, Louisiana, and like Lucas originally from a wealthy Virginia family. John Pendleton King of Georgia was another middle-aged bachelor and although William Rufus King once called him “that strange fellow” in a letter to Buchanan, King of Georgia proved a welcomed member of the mess. The final bachelor to join Buchanan and King would be the twenty-nine-year-old representative William Sterrett Ramsey of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, who tragically committed suicide a short time after entering the House. Overall, the various configurations of bachelor messmates so pleased Buchanan that he boasted to Peter Wager, the Philadelphia merchant (and the messmates’ favored wine importer besides): “I shall be delighted to welcome you to the Bachelor’s mess.”³⁶

³⁶ Goldman, ed., *Congressional Directories*, 304, 318, 330, 344, and 358; and James Buchanan to Peter Wager, Jan. 13, 1838, James Buchanan Letters and Documents, NYPL. Little is likewise known about John P. King, with only a few scattered letters surviving (William R. King’s comment about John P. King may be found in William R. King to James Buchanan, June 2, 1837, James Buchanan Papers, box 5, folder 12, HSP). On Robert C. Nicholas, see Thomas L. Bayne, “Genealogica, Vol. 1,” Bayne Papers, VHS; and for evidence of an early intimate male friendship, see Robert C. Nicholas to James Patton Preston, July 16 and Aug. 13, 1817, in Preston Family Papers, VHS. While most sources cite Nicholas as born in 1793, he was most likely born in 1787 and, keeping with this chronology, graduated from the College of William & Mary in 1803; see note on the Nicholas family bible in Bayne, “Genealogica,” and the listing of the class of 1803 in the *Catalog of Graduates of William and Mary* (1859). On William S. Ramsey, who committed suicide at age thirty, see the anonymous *History of Cumberland and Adams Counties, Pennsylvania*, 3 vols. (Chicago: John Morris, 1886), 1:105, 160; for Buchanan’s obituary of Ramsey, see “William S. Ramsey,” *American Volunteer*, Nov. 19, 1840, page 3 (reprinted from the *Lancaster Intelligencer*); for the memoriam on Ramsey’s life given before the House of Representatives, see *Congressional Globe* 9, no. 2, 26th Congress, 2nd sess., 17-18; for a telling letter of condolence, see

Buchanan's use of the phrase "Bachelor's mess" identified himself as a member of a specific mess, a long-standing practice with roots dating back to the earliest days of the Washington community. Buchanan's conception of his boardinghouse constituting a "Bachelor's mess" supports the historian James S. Young's surmise that "mess group affiliation was recognized as a mark of identification among legislators." In this same vein, the Bachelor's mess can be seen as hearkening back to the boardinghouse fraternities of an earlier era, one in which William Rufus King had himself experienced as a young representative in Washington. Like the boardinghouse fraternities of the early part of the 1800s, the Bachelor's mess was organized along strict political lines (only Democrats would ever join them). In their shared bachelorhood, however, the members of the mess represented something new, since never before had a group of bachelors self-consciously united in a single mess. Then again, Washington of the 1830s was an era in which powerful, unmarried men ruled over the Executive Mansion (Jackson and Van Buren both being widowers), with the bachelors and widowers being an important part of the citizenry and the public sphere more generally. For the first time, men such as James Buchanan, William Rufus King, Edward Lucas, Robert C. Nicholas, and John P. King, could turn a previously stigmatized societal status into a useful political commonality. They were, in a sense, pioneering a new kind of political capital: bachelor power.³⁷

Yet, the possibility for additional political power alone does not fully explain why the Bachelor's mess of Buchanan and King remained a fixture in the years ahead. The domestic institution of the boardinghouse itself provided essential glue to this effort at political

John M. Read to James Buchanan, Oct. 22, 1840, James Buchanan Papers, box 9, folder 5, HSP; and for a series of heartfelt letters that reveal an intimate male friendship, see William S. Ramsey to James Buchanan, May 29, 1838, Aug. 25, and Aug. 31, 1840, James Buchanan Papers, boxes 6, 7, and 9, folders 8, 1, and 11, HSP.

³⁷ Young, *Washington Community*, 100. The change in bachelors' status by the middle of the Nineteenth Century is noted in McCurdy, *Citizen Bachelors*, esp. 198-200.

consolidation. The boardinghouse itself, as Howard Chudacoff notes, was “an important social as well as residential institution for single men.” The Washington boardinghouse was even more crucial for politician bachelors who did not have the support of wives or families at home. Without the usual social restrictions and domestic moderations typically brought about by marriage, the men of the Bachelor’s mess enjoyed an especially jolly camaraderie. Like other groups of politicians lodged together at boardinghouses, the members of Bachelor’s mess became quite close and involved one another in each other’s affairs. They notably consumed of large quantities of alcohol, with Buchanan usually ensuring the delivery of the required payment for the shipments of cases of wine to the mess. While neither “jolly fellows” nor “sporting men,” they demonstrated, in the words of a historian of these antebellum male sub-groups, how “restrained manhood had achieved the status of a coherent outlook and wielded considerable discursive power.”³⁸

Of course, the Bachelor’s mess wielded much more than discursive power. They collectively controlled two major Senate committees: Buchanan the chair of Foreign Relations, which William Rufus King also counted among his committee memberships (previously, John P. King had been a member), and William Rufus King the chair of Commerce (in addition to serving as President *pro tem*). Robert C. Nicholas and Buchanan also both sat on the Senate’s Finance Committee. The bachelor power carried weight outside of the Capitol, too. For example, when Daniel Bryan, the author and postmaster of Alexandria and a constituent of Edward Lucas, sought new political office in 1836, he knew to contact such powerful men as

³⁸ Chudacoff, *Age of the Bachelor*, 32; Richard Stott, *Jolly Fellows: Male Milieus in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2009), 56. About Buchanan’s many wine orders, see James Buchanan to Messrs. Stockton and Stokes, Nov. 18, 1835, James Buchanan Papers, PSU; James Buchanan to Campbell P. White, Dec. 22, 1841, Buchanan Papers, N-YHS; Buchanan to Peter Wager, Dec. 23, 1837, Gilder Lehrman Collection, N-YHS; Buchanan to Wager, Jan. 13, 1838, Dec. 31, 1839, Buchanan Letters and Documents, NYPL.

Senators Buchanan, King, Nicholas, and Brown, among others. Collectively, the various members of the Bachelor's mess had become an integral part of the politics in the Jacksonian period.³⁹

Beyond the possibilities for conviviality, the close quarters of the Washington mess also offered the possibility for the development of intimate male friendship, a somewhat unusual proposition for middle-aged men. As historians of manhood have demonstrated, intimate male friendships formed most often and most intensely in youth, usually in the homosocial spaces of the college campus or in likewise the male-dominated sphere of fraternal associations. The prospect of future marriage was often a key determinant in the eventual decline of intimate male friendships, though here again, not always so. Lifelong intimate male friendships could and did exist in antebellum America, but for sure, they formed less frequently during middle age than in youth. Among middle-aged bachelors, on the other hand, intimate male friendship seems to have faced fewer obstacles in its development. When inculcated in the college dormitory-like atmosphere of the Washington mess, the formation and sustenance of such friendships appear less surprising still.⁴⁰

Of course, many bachelors, even older ones, spent considerable time in the pursuit of marriage. Perhaps for this reason, the bachelor messmates took an especial concern in the romantic lives of one another. Edward Lucas, Robert C. Nicholas, and John P. King would all marry not long after their initial association with the Bachelor's mess. The supremely ambitious Buchanan actively continued to pursue numerous unmarried women. A regular topic of interest concerned Buchanan's "annual pilgrimage" to the mountain resort at Bedford Springs, where

³⁹ Daniel Bryan to Edward Lucas, Nov. 7, 1836, Edward Lucas Papers, DUL.

⁴⁰ On this point, see Rotundo, *American Manhood*; and Balcerski, "'Under These Classic Shades Together.'" Even staunch proponents for the plain existence of homoerotic, and even homosexual, relationships implicitly concede this point in their focus on relatively younger men.

Pennsylvania politicians gathered en masse to discuss politics and enjoy a “gay & agreeable time.” In a letter from October 1836, William Rufus King teased Buchanan about a flirtation with one young woman: “Miss L---, the romping rosy girl you saw at the springs, [who] would probably have been fortunate had some kind friend whispered in her ear, ‘that old Bachelors are mighty uncertain.’” But the sword could cut both ways. In a letter to former messmate Bedford Brown, Buchanan ridiculed King’s aging manhood: “The beauties of a fine foot and anchle [*sic*] and a luxurious form no longer make the same impression upon him as formerly. He is sinking gracefully into the vale of years; but his will be a green old age.” The references to King’s growing impotency and waning attraction to women were only thinly veiled, a sign that the messmates regularly engaged in friendly banter with one another.⁴¹

Such gossip about romantic pursuits appeared regularly in their correspondence. When Buchanan had neglected to respond a letter, King ribbed his messmate’s propensity toward courtships. “Are you so engrossed by the aspirations of ambition, or the hopes, and anxieties of love, that friendship can find no abiding place in your heart?” King asked with all due (and half-mock) dismay. “Or have you been standing on your dignity; and waiting to receive the first card?” By teasing Buchanan’s status as an old bachelor—Buchanan was forty-five in 1836—King, himself an even older bachelor, could take comfort in the follies of his messmate. At times, King also played the epistolary foil to Buchanan’s dalliances. Years later, after Buchanan had written of his encounters with several young women at another summer retreat, King

⁴¹ Edward Lucas married Mary Ellen Johnson on November 10, 1838; Robert C. Nicholas married Susan Adelaide Vinson on October 12, 1840; and John P. King married Mary Louise Woodward on January 10, 1842 (of note, all three men were nearly twice the age of their new brides, respectively). William R. King to James Buchanan, Oct. 5, 1836, James Buchanan Papers, box 4, folder 9, HSP; James Buchanan to L. Harper, Aug. 6, 1851, Gilder Lehrman Collection, N-YHS; and James Buchanan to Bedford Brown, July 30, 1841, Bedford Brown Papers, DUL. On aging and male sexuality in this period, see Kevin J. Mumford, “‘Lost Manhood’ Found: Male Sexual Impotence and Victorian Culture in the United States,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 1 (July 1992): 33-57.

playfully assented to his friend's description: "If to these 'creature comforts' as my letter Methodist Preacher calls them, you add the graceful form & sparkling eyes of Virginia's sprightly Daughters; the place must need be heavenly." As it had in the college dormitory, conversations and correspondence about the romantic pursuit of women could produce intimacy among older men, too.⁴²

The Bachelor's mess remained most politically powerful while the Democratic Party held the reins of power in Washington. With the Whig victory at the polls in the fall of 1840, the decline in the Democracy's political fortunes brought about a corresponding weakening of the Bachelors' mess. A vacancy left by William S. Ramsey's unexpected death left the trio of King, Buchanan, and Nicholas looking for other gentlemanly companions. They happened upon William Henry Roane of Virginia, a Democrat and an elderly widower of King's vintage, for the short lame duck session in December 1840. Roane, who had desired "to be alone" in his boardinghouse, admitted to his daughter that it was "not improbable that one or two vacant rooms may be taken." The arrangement would prove neither deliberate nor permanent, as both Roane and Nicholas had lost their seats to Whig challengers. When the Senate resumed its meetings in May 1841, Buchanan and King continued their mess together, where they were briefly joined by the Alabama senator Clement Comer Clay. When Senator Clay resigned in November 1841, the remaining messmates, Buchanan and King, continued to look for new colleagues. They faced great difficulty in finding replacements, however. Not only were there fewer Democratic senators to choose from, those that remained were happily settled elsewhere.⁴³

⁴² William R. King to James Buchanan, June 2, 1837 and Oct. 5, 1847, box 5, folder 12, and box 16, and folder 18, James Buchanan Papers, HSP.

⁴³ William H. Roane's much younger wife, Sally Anne Lyons (born 1805), predeceased him in 1828, which left his eldest daughter, Sarah Roane Harrison, as his closet confidante. On Roane's boardinghouse arrangements and relationship with Nicholas, see William H. Roane to Sarah Roane Harrison, Dec. 14, 1840, Dec. 23, 1840, Feb. 8 and 17, 1841, Harrison Family Papers, VHS; and Goldman, ed.,

Their former bachelor companions were not forgotten during the period of Whig rule, as both King and Buchanan wrote frequently and kept alive the memory of their Bachelor's mess. Their letters often commented upon one or the other's behaviors and encouraged their correspondents to return to Washington. In a letter from July 1841, Buchanan wrote beseechingly to former messmate Bedford Brown in North Carolina: "King orders me to command you to rouse yourself, to exert all your talents and energies in North Carolina and put down the d---d Whigs." Bedford Brown never returned to the Senate, but fifteen years later, the two former messmates (Brown and Buchanan) could be found recollecting with "peculiar pleasure our intercourse in 'the auld lang syne.'" Without the immediate prospect of their companion returning, King and Buchanan resorted to finding quarters by themselves on the north side of F Street, between Thirteenth and Fourteenth Streets, during the next several years.⁴⁴

By the time of their ultimate separation in 1844, William Rufus King and James Buchanan had shared a mess for nearly ten years, through some eleven sessions of Congress. For much of that time, they were joined together with other unmarried men in their beloved Bachelor's mess. In the history of antebellum Washington messmates, only James Murray

Congressional Directories, 372. Of the three newcomers, Roane only mentioned Robert Nicholas, also a Virginian by birth, in the letters of February 8 and 17, 1841. On Clay's mess with Buchanan and King, see Ruth K. Nuernberger, *The Clays of Alabama: A Planter-Lawyer-Politician Family* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1958), 63.

⁴⁴ James Buchanan to Bedford Brown, July 30, 1841, Bedford Brown Papers, box 1, DUL (see also transcript in "Correspondence of Bedford Brown," ed. William K. Boyd, *An Annual Publication of Historical Papers Published by the Historical Society of Trinity College* 6 (1906): 66-92, here 78-79; William R. King to James Buchanan, Jan. 12, 1851, James Buchanan Papers, box 21, folder 1, HSP; *The Washington Directory and National Register for 1843* (Washington: John T. Towers, 1843), 163; *The Washington Directory and National Register for 1846* (Washington: John T. Towers, 1846), 25. Buchanan and King may have moved at some point to another house near the "Old Capitol" boardinghouse on B Street; see Anne Hollingsworth Wharton, *Social Life in the Early Republic* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1903), 303-04, in which the author remembers "in another house near by, kept by the Misses Harrington, Mr. Buchanan and Mr. William King made their home." For the later correspondence of Brown and Buchanan, see Bedford Brown to James Buchanan, Sept. 21, 1856, *James Buchanan Papers*, ed. Lucy Fisher West (microfilm, 60 reels, Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1974), reel 29; and Buchanan to Brown, Sept. 30, 1856, Bedford Brown Papers, box 1, DUL (see also transcripts in "Correspondence of Bedford Brown," ed. Boyd, 88-92).

Mason and Robert M. T. Hunter can claim a longer stretch of shared residence in the capital. Unlike those two senators from Virginia, however, King and Buchanan did not share common cultural or political origins. Instead, they found in the commonalty of their bachelorhood the necessary components to form both an intimate friendship and a politically powerful boardinghouse fraternity, both constructions that hearkened to an earlier era. In the years ahead, the strength of their bond would be severely tested by the course of events. Would their personal friendship prove to be aligned with the political demands of their constitutions and of the national Democratic Party?⁴⁵

Mr. & Mrs. Buchanan

Whether as a cause or an effect, one undisputable outcome of the Bachelor's mess was the knitting together of a long-term political alliance between James Buchanan and William Rufus King. They two men had begun to position themselves as the last of dying breed of national figures capable of uniting the Democratic Party, a move that reinforced King's course as a moderate southern Unionist and Buchanan's as a safe northern dough-face. In a speech of January 28, 1837, King declared the Senate "the great conservative body of this republic," where the "demon of faction should find no abiding place." Buchanan concurred, echoing his messmate in a speech on the disputed Maine boundary: "This body is truly the conservative body of the country, and we are not to be deterred, through fear of giving offence [*sic*], from marching forward in the course of our duty." Slowly but surely, the two men were building their senatorial

⁴⁵ On the shared mess and friendship of James M. Mason and Robert M. T. Hunter, see chapter 3.

reputations as respected national figures, who could be trusted to bring the necessary electoral votes for their party.⁴⁶

Buchanan and King also found common cause on the politically divisive issue of abolitionism. In January 1836, the Whig senator Thomas Morris of Ohio introduced two antislavery petitions to the Senate. Only weeks earlier, the South Carolina representative James Henry Hammond had proposed a strict “gag rule” on the reception of all such documents. Now, John C. Calhoun moved to proceed in a similar fashion about a petition to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. After a brief but heated series of rhetorical exchanges, the subject was postponed. The senator who had tabled the motion? James Buchanan. Twice more the Senate would debate the antislavery petitions, and each time Buchanan would oppose their reception. At first, he moved to table the motion; later, he proposed that the Senate “receive and reject,” a procedural technicality that essentially held until 1850. Buchanan had become convinced that his method of avoiding the reading of antislavery petitions was “the only mode of avoiding everlasting debate.”⁴⁷

From his perch in the chair of the President *pro tem* of the Senate, King must have been pleased with his messmate’s course of action. In a speech on March 3, 1836, King was almost too embarrassed to add anything more to the “able argument...so strongly and clearly enforced by his friend from Pennsylvania.” The enslaver King agreed with Buchanan on every point, adding in paternalistic language common of that day that slaves were “well-fed, well-clothed,

⁴⁶ *Register of Debates* XIII, 24th Cong., 2nd sess., 618-19; “Remarks, March 1, 1839, on the Resolutions Concerning the Maine Boundary,” in *Works of James Buchanan*, ed. Moore, 5:108.

⁴⁷ Daniel Wirls, “‘The Only Mode of Avoiding Everlasting Debate’: The Overlooked Senate Gag Rule for Antislavery Petitions,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2007), 115-138, esp. 125-129; *Congressional Globe*, Appendix, 25th Cong., 2nd sess., 34-39. For Buchanan’s involvement in the disenfranchisement of free African Americans in Pennsylvania, see Nicholas Wood, “‘A Sacrifice on the Altar of Slavery’: Doughface Politics and Black Disenfranchisement in Pennsylvania, 1837-1838,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 75-106.

happy, and contented.” If slavery were ever to be abolished in Washington, D.C., or elsewhere in the South for that matter, King warned, “the pious ladies of Ohio” would have no fear of visiting the capital, for Southerners would no longer be in attendance at the seat of the federal government. King’s support of the Union had its limits: slavery must be forever protected. A few days later, Buchanan and King celebrated the victory over dinner with the two senators from South Carolina and Mahlon Dickerson of New Jersey, secretary of the navy and himself another bachelor.⁴⁸

With the Congress in recess beginning July 1836, the focus turned toward the upcoming presidential election. Andrew Jackson had reached his customary two-term limit. The Democracy had nominated a ticket of the “Little Magician” Martin Van Buren and the Kentuckian Richard Mentor Johnson to succeed the old general. In opposition, the Whig Party ran a series of favorite sons, including William Henry Harrison of Ohio, Hugh L. White of Tennessee, and Daniel Webster of Massachusetts. Much as had happened in the election of 1824, the Whigs now took the deliberate strategy to throw the election into the House of Representatives. Of the three, Harrison represented the most serious threat to the Jacksonians. Van Buren would carry both the popular vote and the Electoral College, but only barely so. He would face an uncertain reelection four years hence.

Perhaps the most pressing question of the day was the fate of the federal moneys deposited throughout the various “pet banks,” an arrangement favored by Andrew Jackson. When President Martin Van Buren proposed an Independent Treasury plan, Buchanan and King naturally declared themselves for the idea. The removal of deposits from the Bank of the United States “has done us much mischief,” King lamented in a June 1837 letter to Buchanan, but the

⁴⁸ Martin, “William Rufus King,” 156-62; *Register of Debates* XII, 24th Cong., 1st sess., 717-21; Diary entry, Mar. 7, 1836, Mahlon Dickerson Diary, 1832-1845, Mahlon Dickerson and Philemon Dickerson Papers, box 4, folder 1, NJHS.

Alabama senator faithfully supported Jackson's "specie circular," which mandated the payment of gold in the sale of public land. Buchanan thoroughly concurred with King on this point, when he delivered, in his biographer's estimation, "one of the best speeches of his life" in favor of the sub-treasury bill before the Senate. The prosperous Pennsylvanian warned of a "stimulus of excessive banking" and again that the "banks are all-powerful." The Senate passed the Independent Treasury bill in 1837, though the House would not ultimately agree to its provisions for another three years. Given Buchanan's beginnings as a pro-tariff, pro-bank Federalist, this was indeed a mighty shift.⁴⁹

With Jackson out of the picture and Van Buren's support weakened by the ongoing financial panic, Democrats everywhere sensed the vice-presidency to be open for reconsideration in the upcoming election of 1840. King had been duly nominated by his home state of Alabama and also Buchanan's home state of Pennsylvania. Other competitors included the incumbent, Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky, Robert J. Walker of Mississippi, and James K. Polk of Tennessee. Among Polk's greatest partisans was Aaron Venable Brown, a Tennessee congressman and an unfaltering Jacksonian. In one notable letter to Polk, Brown bashed "Little Senator Walker" and "'Aunt Nancy,' (K of Ala)." Brown did not hide his disdain for Buchanan, either: "[Buchanan] carries his head more *one sided* than usual." Brown further sneered, "The Great *Humbucker*, *affects* great impartiality—but 'all in my eye' depend upon it," as much a knock on Buchanan's outward claim of impartiality in the contest, as on his noted habit of squinting and cocking his head to one side.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Martin, "William Rufus King," 147-155; William R. King to James Buchanan, June 2, 1837, James Buchanan Papers, box 5, folder 12, HSP; James Buchanan, "Speech, September 29, 1837, on Making Public Officers Depositories," in *Works of James Buchanan*, ed. Moore, 3: 266, 270.

⁵⁰ Historians have often relied on the writings of the Tennessee politico Aaron Venable Brown for his colorful commentary on the King and Buchanan relationship. A close ally of James K. Polk, Brown might have been a rival of King from a young age. Much like King, Brown had attended the University

Brown rightly criticized Buchanan's role in the vice-presidential intrigue. The Pennsylvanian had indeed distributed a campaign biography of King to the state press and employed his wide network of political correspondents on his messmate's behalf. One such correspondent was Eliza Violet Gist Blair, the daughter of the influential Francis Preston Blair, to whom he wrote: "As a lady, however, possessing, as I know, [King's] esteem in an eminent degree, I thought you might reciprocate it by speaking a kind word for him among your friends & particularly among the sex who rightfully govern mankind." Not wanting to leave the impression with Eliza Blair that he wished to replace Johnston outright, Buchanan added in his

of North Carolina and became a member of the Philosophic Society, graduating as valedictorian of his class in 1814. Brown also headed farther west after graduation, to Tennessee, where he began to practice law with another ambitious migrant and graduate of the university, James K. Polk. Like Polk, Brown proved to a staunch supporter of Andrew Jackson and all those favored by the old general. For his loyalty, his party thrice elected Brown to the House. No full-length biography of Brown has been written. For useful snapshots, see Jonathan M. Atkins, "Aaron Venable Brown," *American National Biography Online*; and Charles Lanman, ed., *Dictionary of the United States Congress: Compiled as a Manual of Reference for the Legislator and Statesman* (Washington, D.C., 1864), 55. Brown and Polk exchanged dozens of letters over the course of two decades. Mostly the letters concerned the political news of the day, but Brown often gossiped about and disparaged Polk's many rivals, including John Quincy Adams ("old Adams") and Henry Clay ("the Master Spirit of the new administration [of President William Henry Harrison]"). But these were mild rebukes compared to the language Brown reserved for King and Buchanan; see Brown to George Washington Jones, Dec. 20, 1840, July 3, 1842, Aug. 8, 1842, April 9, 1843, and May 19, 1843, George Washington Jones Papers, box 1, folders 1-2, SHC. For Brown's description of King, see Brown to James K. Polk, [May 3, 1840], in *The Correspondence of James K. Polk*, 11 vols., ed. Wayne Cutler et al (Nashville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1969-), 5:436. The editors noted that "Aunt Nancy" referred to "William Rufus King, whose primness, meticulous dress, and formal manners earned him the appellation, 'Aunt Nancy,' while 'all in my eye' derived from Oliver Goldsmith, *The Good-Natured Man*, act 2 (1768). Brown was not the only correspondent of Polk's to ridicule King and Buchanan. The Tennessee Congressman Harvey Magee Watterson declared, in an allusion to a possible sexual relationship: "Buchannon [*sic*] is so anxious for the nomination that he has *almost* turned *crossed-eyed*...I regard his prospects as peculiarly gloomy, but not more so than those of his friend Col King of Alabama who would like the best of all things in the world to be run upon *his* ticket for Vice President." Harvey M. Watterson to James K. Polk, May 2, 1842, in *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, ed. Cutler, 6:57. On George Washington Jones, see Jonathan M. Atkins, "'The Purest Democrat': The Career of Congressman George W. Jones," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 2-21, esp. 4-6.

maddeningly elliptical manner: “We were disposed to let things take their natural course, not however forgetting Col. King.”⁵¹

In the end, the Democracy, fractured over the administration’s monetary policy into so-called “Soft” and “Hard” factions, opted to continue with the ticket of Van Buren and Johnson for 1840. King expressed deep gratitude to Buchanan for his efforts. “I can but feel grateful at the lively interest you manifest,” he wrote in June 1839. King publicly expressed his support for the ticket, though privately he complained to his niece that Polk had “thrust himself forward,” upsetting the convention in favor of the incumbent Johnson. For their part, the Whigs rejected their traditional champions and ran war hero William Henry Harrison, whom King once called “that vain ridiculous fellow” in a letter to Buchanan, on a log cabin and hard cider platform. was voted into office in a wave of popular enthusiasm. The ensuing Whig victory came as a major shock in Washington. Not since the election of Andrew Jackson had the government faced such a turnover in political direction. While Henry Clay and the Whigs itched to seize power and distribute lucrative patronage, the Democrats stood equally ready to oppose them at every direction. The stage was set for the emergence of personal hostilities of a divided government.⁵²

In a special session of Congress in March 1841, the lame duck Senate was asked to consider the appointment of new federal officers. In the ensuing debate, Henry Clay clashed with William Rufus King on one notable occasion. King had asserted that the character of the current editor of the *Congressional Globe*, the Jackson stalwart Francis P. Blair, would “compare

⁵¹ James Buchanan to Eliza Violet Gist Blair, May 15, 1839, Blair and Lee Family Papers, box 42, folder 5, PUL. For another account of Buchanan’s motivation in backing King, see “Diaries of S.H. Laughlin of Tennessee, 1840-1843,” ed. St. George L. Sioussat, *Tennessee Historical Magazine* 2 (Mar. 1916): 43-85, esp. 54.

⁵² Martin, “William Rufus King,” 168-70; William R. King to James Buchanan, June 20, 1839, James Buchanan Papers, box 7, folder 5, HSP; William R. King to Catherine Parrish Ellis, March 6, 1840, William Rufus King Papers, ADAH; William R. King to James Buchanan, Oct. 5, 1836, James Buchanan Papers, box 4, folder 9, HSP. On the contest for the vice-presidency in 1840, see Charles G. Sellers, *James K. Polk, Jacksonian, 1795-1843* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), 401-13.

gloriously” to that of Henry Clay. The Tennessee senator Alfred Nicholson reported to Polk that “Mr. Clay considered this remark as placing Blair on an equality with himself, and therefore pronounced it false and *cowardly*.” Through the office of Senator Lewis Fields Linn, a Democrat from Missouri, King promptly issued a challenge to Clay. Both men went so far as to arrange for seconds: King chose Linn and Senator Ambrose Hundley Sevier, a Jacksonian Democrat from Arkansas. Although he was less intimate with these two men, King apparently could not rely upon Buchanan, a Northerner and one not schooled in the culture of honor, to serve as a second. Cultural differences yet limited their friendship.⁵³

The affair remained uncertain until the next day. “Clay’s insolence is insufferable, and it will not be borne,” Alfred Nicholson had predicted. Had it not been for the Senate sergeant-at-arms Edward Dyer, the challenge might have escalated. To prevent the two aging statesmen from taking any further steps, Dyer arrested both men and turned them over to local authorities. Clay issued a bond for five thousand dollars, promising to keep the peace. He subsequently apologized in full to King, who followed suit. There were apparently no hard feelings, since Clay later approached King’s desk and in a friendly manner said, “King, give us a pinch of your snuff.” The exchange ended happily with applause from the gallery, but the incident revealed King, often degraded as effeminate, to be still quite capable of participating in the masculine world of affairs of honor.⁵⁴

⁵³ Alfred O.P. Nicholson to James K. Polk, March 9, 1841; *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, ed. Cutler, 5:654. Lewis Fields Linn and Ambrose Hundley Sevier are little remembered. On Linn, see James R. Hartley, “The Political Career of Lewis Fields Linn” (M.A. thesis, Univ. of Missouri, Columbia, 1951); and on Sevier, see Brian Walton, “Ambrose Hundley Sevier in the United States Senate, 1836-1848,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 32 (Spring 1973): 25-60.

⁵⁴ Nicholson to Polk, March 9, 1841; *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, ed. Cutler, 5:655. The best account is Robert Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York: Norton, 1991), 574-75; see also Martin, “William Rufus King: Southern Moderate,” 183-186.

The first Whig administration lasted barely a month. William Henry Harrison famously caught pneumonia, having delivered the longest inaugural address in presidential history (and without the requisite coat or top hat). To Harrison's vice-presidential running mate, John Tyler (of "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too" fame) fell the duties of the presidential office. Many, Henry Clay among them, assumed that Tyler would follow the Whig platform. But Tyler was an aristocratic Virginia Democrat of the old school. His disdain for Andrew Jackson, latent from the start of the old general's rise, emerged into the public view over the nullification crisis. Tyler had aligned with the Whigs, but he never abandoned his Democratic, albeit anti-Jackson inflected, principles. His enemies, which were legion, called him "His Accidency."⁵⁵

With Henry Clay and his allies now in power in the Senate, the Whig Party's program for internal improvements, protective tariffs, and centralized banking became top priorities. Now King and Buchanan worked together as never before to oppose the plan. "Not far from [King] sat James Buchanan, always in full dress, a warm personal friend of Mr. King," remembered a recorder of the period. Their efforts would not be enough; the Whig majority easily passed their numerous bills through the Senate. The Democrats were granted unexpected aid, however, by President Tyler's veto, an instrument that he employed on multiple occasions throughout his presidency. In return, King sustained the president on numerous speeches in the Senate.⁵⁶

The Senate was deeply divided by the two parties: personal rancor became commonplace among members. James Buchanan, not usually one to quarrel with other senators, nevertheless publicly clashed with Henry Clay. As Clay's biographer notes, the Kentuckian "rarely missed an opportunity to mock Senator Buchanan." On one memorable occasion, Clay apologized to

⁵⁵ For a recent biography of Tyler, see Gary May, *John Tyler* (New York: Times Books, 2008). Harrison may not have died of pneumonia after all; see Jane McHugh and Philip A. Mackowiak, "What Really Killed William Henry Harrison?", *New York Times*, Mar. 31, 2014.

⁵⁶ Martin, "William Rufus King," 187-200; Henry W. Hilliard, "The Old Senate Chamber," *Appleton's Journal*, May 30, 1876.

Buchanan for his lack of “a more lady-like manner of expressing myself,” replying to Old Buck in “mellifluous tones.” Not to be outdone, Buchanan quipped that Clay’s manner was “greatly improved.” On another occasion, Clay ridiculed Buchanan’s notorious squint—crossed-eyes supposedly being a sign of stupidity. He also called out the Pennsylvanian for never having taken “any fair lady” under his care. Other Whigs had mixed reactions to the duo. John Quincy Adams wrote in his diary that King was “a gentle slave-monger,” as much a knock on King’s widely perceived effeminacy as a dismissal of his ties to the world of slave-holding cotton plantation.⁵⁷

All the while, the Democrats plotted to regain the White House. In January 1844, the presumptive nominee of the Democratic Party was still thought to be the former President Martin Van Buren (he had not yet declared himself against the annexation of Texas and thus lost the confidence of the party). Nevertheless, other candidates were suggested for top honors, including Buchanan. The vice-presidency was also contested. As they had in 1840, James K. Polk and William Rufus King again vied for second honors. So too, for the first time, a combined Buchanan-King ticket was a viable option for the Democratic Party.⁵⁸

But the sharks could smell the blood in the water. Tennessee Democrats were closing ranks behind Polk: King, and by extension Buchanan, became the targets of their unrestrained scorn. In late 1843, Andrew Jackson had written Van Buren with his endorsement of Polk, “the strongest and truest man in the South,” for the vice-presidency. Jackson despised King, whom

⁵⁷ The various exchanges between Buchanan and King may be found in the *Congressional Globe*, 27th Cong., 1st Sess., 222-23; *Congressional Globe*, 27th Congress, 2nd Sess., 287-88; and Nathan Sargent, *Public Men and Events*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1875), 1:287-88; see also Remini, *Henry Clay*, 477, 586, and 604; “May 10, 1844,” in *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, 12 vols. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1874-77), 12:25.

⁵⁸ Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 151-162. See also John S. D. Eisenhower, “The Election of James K. Polk, 1844,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 74-87.

he thought foppish and effeminate; he had reportedly labeled King as “Miss Nancy” and, alternatively, “Aunt Nancy,” the latter an appellation that Jackson used to describe many others besides King. Jackson also detested Buchanan. He had once chided an overzealous Buchanan for not minding his own business, when Old Hickory had facetiously proposed to receive a proper English lady in the dishabille of his dressing gown. In a telling exchange with Polk, Jackson made clear his feelings about Buchanan, explaining that he had sent him to Russia because “[i]t was as far as I could send him out my sight...I would have sent him to the North Pole if we had kept a minister there!” Executive distaste for King likewise continued into the presidency of Martin Van Buren, who followed his predecessor’s tactics and tried to remove King from the scene with an appointment to the ministry in Austria (perhaps second only in undesirability to the Russian ministry). The Alabaman would have no part in the assignment, as the future Supreme Court justice John Catron reported in disbelief: “King refused *openly*, the Austrian mission & said he’d been up to the Presdt’s to refuse.”⁵⁹

Unlike the relatively mild contest of four years earlier, the vice-presidential nomination in 1844 produced bitter feelings on all sides. A war of words soon erupted in the Washington *Daily Globe*. On January 8, 1844, an anonymous author, “Amicus,” promoted King for the

⁵⁹ Buchanan often spoke glowingly of the old general in later life, but Jackson did not trust him: Buchanan’s early Federalist principles and rash involvement in the election of 1824 left a lasting distaste. Andrew Jackson to Martin Van Buren, November 29, 1843, in John S. Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 7 vols. (Washington, D.C., Carnegie Institution, 1926-1935), 6:246. The editors of the Polk papers add, without further citation: “William Rufus King, for many years James Buchanan’s roommate and special friend, received his nickname, ‘Aunt Nancy,’ from Andrew Jackson in the early 1830s” (*Correspondence of James K. Polk*, ed. Cutler, 6:45). The word “roommate” is inaccurate; each man took an individual room in a shared mess. The phrase “Aunt Nancy” did not stick among contemporaries: Brown used it only twice, and Polk’s many other correspondents not at all. Like so many of his more colorful phrases, Jackson was recorded to have used the phrase by contemporary observers. For example, John Quincy Adams recorded in his diary that Jackson used the phrase “Miss Nancy” to describe King; see “May 10, 1844,” in *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, ed. Adams, 12:25 (in the same entry, Adams tied King’s appointment as Minister to France to his previous near duel with Henry Clay). For a useful etymology of the term “Miss Nancy,” see Saum, ““Who Steals My Purse,”” 189:fn39. For the report of King’s refusal of the Austrian mission, see John Catron to James K. Polk, March 13, [1837], in *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, ed. Cutler, 4:77-79.

party's vice-presidential nomination. Polk's confidant Cave Johnson thought the plodding style of "Amicus" smacked of Buchanan. In reply, the Tennessee Democrat Aaron V. Brown, under the assumed name "A Tennessee Democrat," attacked King and boosted for Polk. Never an equal partner in Polk's political campaigns, Aaron V. Brown exerted extra effort to give the appearance of a loyal Polk man in 1840 and 1844.⁶⁰

Indeed, four years had done nothing to soften Aaron Brown's opinion of King and Buchanan. On January 14, 1844, Brown wrote Sarah Childress Polk, wife of James K. Polk, a four-page "confidential" letter relating political news of the day in Washington City. His language was unusually vitriolic and more salacious than that which Brown typically used in the letters to her husband. "Mr. Buchanon [*sic*] and *his wife*," Brown noted with disgust, remained ever the political unit. Yet, Brown predicted that "*Mrs. B.*" might benefit from unhitching his political star from Buchanan: "Mr. Buchanan looks gloomy & dissatisfied & so did *his better half* until a little private flattery & a certain newspaper puff which you doubtless noticed, excited hopes that by getting *a divorce* she might set up again in the world to some tolerable advantage." Brown further chirped, "*Aunt Nancy* may be now seen every day, tringed [*sic*] out in her best clothes & smirking about in hopes of seeing better times than with her former companion." Mrs. Polk likely nodded in agreement when Brown concluded that King got what "every prude deserves who sets herself up for more than she is worth."⁶¹

⁶⁰ On the battle for the vice-presidential nomination, see Martin, "William Rufus King, Southern Moderate," 201-16; Cave Johnson to James K. Polk, Jan. 13, 21, and Feb. 6, 1844, in *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, ed. Cutler, 7:25-29, 51-56; James K. Polk to Cave Johnson, January 21, 1844, in *ibid.*, 7:38-44; and Aaron V. Brown to James K. Polk, Jan. 22 and Feb. 2, 1844; in *ibid.*, 44-46.

⁶¹ For the "confidential" letter to Sarah Childress Polk, see Aaron V. Brown to Sarah Childress Polk, Jan. 14, 1844, in *James K. Polk Papers* (microfilm, 67 reels, Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1969), reel 25. Compared to the hundreds of surviving letters between Brown and James K. Polk, only one such letter survives to Sarah Childress Polk, perhaps a sign that Polk greatly valued the document. See also, Sellers, *James K. Polk, Jacksonian*, 464-69.

No record exists of Sarah Childress Polk's reply or what she might have thought of Brown's colorful descriptions of Buchanan and King. She almost certainly shared the letter with her husband. From the outset, Sarah Childress Polk had been an integral part of her husband's many campaigns for political office. In a world in which women brokered patronage and military appointments, Sarah Childress Polk also used gossip for political ends and to provide a human element to her relatively dour husband (indeed, the gregarious Franklin Pierce had once observed that he would rather chat with Mrs. Polk than discuss politics with her husband). The many colorful phrases of Brown's letter, especially its usage of feminine pronouns to describe King, had the effect of emasculating the man, and by extension his vice-presidential candidacy. The colorful description of King as "Aunt Nancy" and Buchanan as cross-eyed enabled Mrs. Polk to spread gossip easily about her husband's rivals, among other female correspondents in the higher echelons of Tennessee society. With this portrait of King circulating among Tennessee's Democratic elites, Mrs. Polk aided her husband's campaign for the vice-presidency, albeit from behind the scenes.⁶²

The debate continued through the month. The Polk supporter Hopkins L. Turney responded to a second article from "Amicus" (this one also likely written by Buchanan). As early as December, King had resigned himself to being passed over for the nomination, though

⁶² On the importance of women as political operators in their husband's campaigns, see Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, esp. 102-146; and on the role of Tennessee women such as Polk in the national elections of 1840 and 1844, see esp. Jayne C. DeFiore, "COME, and Bring the Ladies: Tennessee Women and the Politics of Opportunity during the Presidential Campaign of 1840 and 1844," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 51 (Winter 1992): 197-212; and Janet L. Coryell, "Superseding Gender: The Role of the Woman Politico in Antebellum Partisan Politics," in *Women and the Unstable State in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Alison M. Parker and Sarah B. Gordon (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2000): 84-112. About Sarah Childress Polk, see Anson Nelson and Fanny Nelson, *Memorials of Sarah Childress Polk* (1892; reprint, Newtown, Conn.: American Political Biography Press, 1994), esp. 52; John R. Bumgarner, *Sarah Childress Polk: A Biography of the Remarkable First Lady* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1997); Robert P. Watson, *First Ladies of the United States: A Biographical Directory* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 74-79; and Amy S. Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), esp. 27-33.

he perhaps held some small hope for it. Then, in April 1844, President John Tyler indirectly helped to decide the matter. He offered King the valuable appointment of Minister of France, a position vacant since the Senate had refused to approve the divisive Virginia politico Henry A. Wise. King dutifully accepted the position, and the Senate swiftly approved its former President *pro tem*. Within a month, King, his niece Catherine Parrish Ellis, his two nephews Alfred Beck and William Thomas King, and his slave John Bell would all be on their way to Paris.⁶³

As President Tyler may have intended, King's appointment to France also permanently dashed any hopes he may have held for being selected for the vice-presidency at the party's upcoming nominating convention in Baltimore. At the convention, Van Buren was quickly cast aside (a move King privately favored in his correspondence with Buchanan), leaving the Michigander Lewis Cass as the next best choice (Buchanan had already long since been discarded). When Cass failed to gain the necessary two-thirds majority, the historian-politician George Bancroft proposed James K. Polk, the presumptive vice-presidential nominee. The delegates accepted the compromise. Polk became the first "dark horse" candidate to emerge from a nominating convention. As a sop to Pennsylvania, Polk offered the vice-presidency to Buchanan, whose supporters quickly rebuffed the offer. Instead, in an ironic twist, the former Philadelphia mayor George Dallas—Buchanan's great political rival in the state—was chosen as Polk's running mate. Nevertheless, Buchanan began the campaign to elect "Young Hickory" to the White House without hesitation. King was less sanguine, fretting to Buchanan: "I have the opinion that Polk and Dallas were bad selections." Polk's unexpected triumph at the polls in the

⁶³ William R. King to Catherine Parrish Ellis, Dec. 12, 1843, William Rufus King Papers, ADAH; Martin, "William Rufus King," 215.

fall proved King to be wholly mistaken, but he would not be on hand to witness the victory. Instead, a painful two-year exile awaited him.⁶⁴

Gone a Wooing

William Rufus King's appointment as Minister to France brought with it the end of his shared mess with James Buchanan. The departure was evidently painful for both men. "Could I have taken you by the hand to say God bless you, before leaving Washington," he confided to Buchanan in a letter written from New York City, "I should have left it without regret." King also added a telling interrogatory, "Did you not write to Mrs. Roosevelt?" Buchanan had indeed written to Cornelia Roosevelt, whose husband was James John Roosevelt, known as James I., a former Democratic congressman and a prominent resident of New York City. King was staying with the Roosevelts while he prepared for his transatlantic voyage. Buchanan's letter to Cornelia Roosevelt is the most revealing account of his feelings of intimate friendship for King and, therefore, the single most important surviving document about their relationship remaining to historians.⁶⁵

To begin the letter, Buchanan commented upon affairs in Washington, playfully remarking to Mrs. Roosevelt: "I envy Colonel King the pleasure of meeting you & would give

⁶⁴ William R. King to James Buchanan, May 10 and 14, 1844, James Buchanan Papers, box 11, folder 6, HSP; William R. King to James Buchanan, Nov. 14, 1844, *ibid.*, box 11, folder 13. Dallas had intersected with Buchanan before. He followed his fellow Pennsylvanian as minister to Russia in 1837. In 1839, he rejected the Attorney-General spot, in imitation of Buchanan. In later years, he would succeed Buchanan again, this time as Minister to the Court of St. James. On Dallas, see the informative biography by John M. Belohlavek, *George Mifflin Dallas: Jacksonian Patrician* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1977), esp. 79-98.

⁶⁵ William R. King to James Buchanan, May 10, 1844, James Buchanan Papers, box 11, folder 6, HSP. In their letters with one another, both King and Buchanan deployed numerous sentimental expressions that can be found elsewhere in their correspondence. For an example of King's use of the phrase "to take by the hand" in saying farewell from this same period, see William R. King to Francis S. Claxton, May 2, 1844, James Buchanan Papers, box 56, folder 2, HSP.

any thing in reason to be of the party for a single week.” Buchanan complained that he was “‘solitary & alone,’ having no companion in the house with me.” He further added: “I have gone a wooing to several gentlemen, but have not succeeded with any one of them.” If the present desperate situation continued, Buchanan, not wanting to be alone, felt that he “should not be astonished to find myself married to some old maid who can nurse me when I am sick, provide good dinners for me when I am well & not expect from me any very ardent or romantic affection.”⁶⁶

Buchanan’s complaints of solitude echoed the histrionic self-effacement that he employed with many of his other female correspondents. For her part, Cornelia Roosevelt surely would have recognized the playfulness of Buchanan’s tone, as they were frequent correspondents. From their surviving letters, it is clear that Buchanan enjoyed a chatty epistolary style with Cornelia Roosevelt, quite different from the more formal language that he employed with even his closest of male friends. For all his emotive outpouring, too, the letter illustrates the practical difficulty of finding new messmates with whom to “unite.” Whether or not he cared to admit it, Buchanan had thrown in his political, and domestic lot, with King. Once the Alabaman had left, there remained no one to whom he could turn for companionship while in Washington. Most likely the “several gentlemen” whom he “wooed” were quite content with their living arrangements, or they were simply not interested in joining the mess of an old bachelor and waning political operator.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ James Buchanan to Cornelia Roosevelt, May 13, 1844, James Buchanan Papers, box 46, folder 9, HSP. For a similar example of Buchanan’s use of “solitary and alone” (always in quotations in the original letters), in a different context, see James Buchanan to C.L. Ward, Dec. 6, 1853, Buchanan Papers, N-YHS.

⁶⁷ William R. King to James Buchanan, May 10, 1844, James Buchanan Papers, box 11, folder 6, HSP; James Buchanan to Cornelia Roosevelt, May 13, 1844, *ibid.*, box 46, folder 9; Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 100. For a later letter that reveals the continued playful nature of their correspondence, see Buchanan to Roosevelt, Feb. 14, 1863, James Buchanan Papers, box 52, folder 2, HSP.

Without the prospects of future company, Buchanan turned to the familiar refuge of his bachelorhood, a recurring trope in his earlier personal correspondence (one, notably, only in letters to women). His lament for “some old maid who can nurse me” was more theatrical performance than reality. While years earlier Buchanan had hired the Lancaster woman Esther Parker to do keep his house, the question of his bachelorhood remained unresolved (even at age fifty-three). Marriage to an “old maid,” a phrase commonly used to describe a woman who remained unmarried into middle age and beyond, could prove a useful pairing for an “uncertain” bachelor such as Buchanan. Such a union would relieve Buchanan of the “ardent or romantic affection” expected by a younger, more fertile female partner. Clearly such an outcome was attractive to Buchanan, perhaps because he worried about his own sexual potency at his relatively advanced age or perhaps because of his concern over sexual performance (and attraction) to women more generally. As with so much the elliptical prose style of Buchanan’s correspondence, the meaning of this tantalizing sentence remains decidedly ambiguous.

Mrs. Roosevelt passed along the letter to King, who wrote back immediately. King spent pages speculating about the upcoming election, but he added a personal note in conclusion: “I am selfish enough to hope you will not be able to procure an associate, who will cause you to feel no regret at our separation. For myself, I shall feel lonely in the midst of Paris, for there I shall have no Friends with whom I can commune as with my own thoughts.” King’s impending isolation in France would prevent further “communion”—a word that he used here and in other letters to mean sharing his thoughts—with his “Friend” (and a word he usually capitalized in reference to political friends, or allies). King and Buchanan had spent a good portion of the past ten years

living together in a Washington boardinghouse. Understandably, King did not wish to feel easily replaceable by a new “associate,” or messmate.⁶⁸

King likely felt more respect and admiration for Buchanan than he received in return. Buchanan only expressed regret that he would be “solitary and alone” without King’s presence in Washington, never that he actually missed his former housemate himself. In his letter to Mrs. Roosevelt, after all, Buchanan reported that he had taken the immediate practical steps of attempting to locate new messmates for the boardinghouse. In June 1844, Buchanan wrote to Mathilda Catron, the wife of the Supreme Court Justice John Catron of Tennessee, that he thought “it not good for a man to be alone” and complained of laying his “old head on young shoulders” of other men’s wives. Catron replied that she had taken the unusual step of engaging her own husband to arrange for the couple to board with Buchanan during the upcoming congressional session. Not surprisingly, without the quotidian concerns of life in the mess to bind Buchanan to King, or any perceived advantages from their continued friendship, the ever-ambitious Buchanan quickly moved on to new prospects. Indeed, Buchanan claimed that his friendship with King did not even afford him the necessary knowledge to write a campaign biography about his longtime messmate. “Intimate as I am with Colonel King,” he wrote to a Democratic Party regular in 1843, “I do not possess the necessary information to write a sketch of his public life.” After 1844, Buchanan and King never again resided together in Washington.⁶⁹

How unusual was the ten-year period of the shared mess of Buchanan and King and the intimate friendship that they shared? Certainly, it was an uncommonly long shared residence

⁶⁸ William R. King to James Buchanan, May 14, 1844, James Buchanan Papers, box 11, folder 6, HSP.

⁶⁹ The two letters noted above are Mathilda Catron to James Buchanan, July 4, 1844, and Buchanan to Catron, [n.d., ca. July 12, 1844], in *Works*, ed. Moore, 6:60-61 (neither of the originals have been located). For the comment about King, see James Buchanan to Barnabus Bates, July 21, 1843, James Buchanan Papers, box 2, folder 5, DCL.

and a deeply intimate one at that. In this latter respect, especially, Buchanan and King can fairly be said to have set something of a standard for intimate male friendship in Washington. Writing to his friend John Clifford in 1848, the conservative Whig representative Robert Winthrop of Massachusetts spoke of Buchanan and King in precisely these terms: “Since my return I have taken my old friend [New Jersey] Senator [Jacob] Miller into partnership, & we live like Achilles & Patroclus,- or, it were more modest to say, Nisus & Euryalus. A less *anachronous* comparison would be Buchanan & King of Alabama, who chummed together for a term of years, to the envy of all the old maids in the Metropolis.” Of note, Winthrop invoked the pious love of the classical analogues of Achilles and Patroclus and Nisus and Euryalus as a favorable comparison to his own relationship with Senator Jacob Miller of New Jersey. In the same vein, Winthrop compared his “partnership” with Jacob Miller to that of Buchanan and King’s. Yet, he could not help himself from adding the final remark about the “envy of all the old maids,” perhaps meant as a cruel jibe at the two old bachelors or perhaps offered in recognition of their many failed attempts at courtships (at least in Buchanan’s case). Regardless, Winthrop admired Buchanan and King highly enough to strive for a similar level of intimacy with his own mess arrangement with Miller.⁷⁰

The Winthrop observation also suggests another way to understand the Buchanan and King friendship. Winthrop curiously deployed the word “chum,” most commonly used in describing the living arrangements of college students in dormitories. As has been suggested, the college campus often produced some of the most intimate male friendships in the antebellum era. On the whole and by comparison, the congressional mess was most certainly less intimate than

⁷⁰ Robert C. Winthrop to John Clifford, June 4, 1848 (copy), *Winthrop Papers*, ed. Marjorie F. Gutheim (microfilm, 53 reels, Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1975), reel 39 (vol. 32, pp. 311-312). In thinking through the meaning of love and classical friendship in antiquity, the meditation offered by C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1960), remains helpful; also useful is William Deresiewicz, “Faux Friendship,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Dec. 6, 2009.

the college dormitory. Yet in its ideal form, as Winthrop seems to suggest, the boardinghouse fraternity provided the platform for intimacy on the level not only of Achilles and Patroclus, but of Buchanan and King. To say, as Winthrop does, that Buchanan and King chummed together effectively removes the erotic potentialities from the congressional mess, a step that scholars today may be unwilling to take. Nevertheless, it reveals a telling perception of the mess as a de-sexualized space in which pure love between men could still exist. In the era before the scientific classification of homosexuality, Winthrop's analogy should not surprise.

If Buchanan and King had set a standard for intimate male friendship in Washington, they must have shared details about nearly every facet of their respective lives. Indeed, Buchanan grew more intimate with members of King's extended family. He came to know King's niece, Catherine Parrish Ellis and recommended her warmly to friends. To a New York socialite, Buchanan noted King's impending departure to France in May 1844: "Col. King takes out with him Mrs. Ellis, his niece. I was acquainted with her some years ago & liked her very much. I hope you will be of the same opinion." In his now missing letters to King, Buchanan often sent his kindest remembrances to Ellis. In one such letter from May 1842, King served as a proxy for Buchanan's praise, when he wrote to Ellis: "Your friend Buchanan was highly flattered by your accession to the ranks of his friends, and counts most sanguinely on receiving the vote of Alabama by means of your influence." King noted the "extravagant terms of admiration" of Buchanan's affection and playfully demurred at the prospect of Buchanan's affections being interpreted too arduously, "lest it might excite the jealousy of a certain gentleman in Tuscaloosa who professes to have claims upon you, to the exclusion of all others," namely, Ellis's husband.

As he had done before, King used Buchanan's professed affections for younger women to mock his messmate.⁷¹

The flirtations among Buchanan and King's relatives continued through the ensuing years. At some point, Buchanan had professed a romantic interest in another one of King's nieces, Margaret Williams King. Born in 1830, Margaret was fully thirty-nine years Buchanan's junior, a difference that hardly deterred the old bachelor. "Margaret has returned to the house of her childhood," William Rufus King reported in June 1850, "where you must seek and win her." Three years later, without any further action from Buchanan, Catherine Parrish Ellis felt compelled to write to Buchanan about her cousin: "Maggie sends her love and reminds you of an engagement existing between you and herself, and says, she will expect its fulfillment, if you go to England." Buchanan eventually did go to England (as the Minister to the Court of St. James), but he did not fulfill his promise. Buchanan's last chance at marriage had slipped away. If Buchanan's final courtship of Margaret King seems insincere in retrospect, it is nevertheless indicative of the many connections not just between James Buchanan and William Rufus King, but also of their respective families.⁷²

Everything He Ought to Be

With King in France and Buchanan busy campaigning for Polk and Dallas, the two men had numerous opportunities to correspond with one another. As such, the greatest number of letters exchanged between the two men survives from this period of transatlantic separation. As

⁷¹ James Buchanan to Cornelia Roosevelt, May 13, 1844, James Buchanan Papers, box 46, folder 9, HSP; William R. King to Catherine Parrish Ellis, May 20, 1842, William Rufus King Papers, box 1, folder 3, ADAH.

⁷² Margaret Williams King married the planter and doctor William Augustine Jones, himself a much older widower, on October 16, 1854. William R. King to James Buchanan, June 8, 1850, James Buchanan Papers, box 20, folder 20, HSP; Catherine Parrish Ellis to James Buchanan, Mar. 9, 1853, *ibid.*, box 23, folder 11; Johnston, "William R. King and His Kin," 56.

had been the pattern in their earlier correspondence, King wrote steadily to Buchanan. After six months had passed without a single reply, King seethed with annoyance at his former messmate: “I had sworn in my wrath that I would never again employ my almost disabled hand in writing to you, untill [*sic*] you condescended to give me an answer.” Two months later, King still had not heard back from Buchanan, though he had received a box of Madeira wine—Buchanan’s drink of choice—on the last steamer. This mollified King, who hoped Buchanan might yet visit Paris, to “enjoy the gayities [*sic*] of this city of pleasure.” He offered the olive branch to Buchanan, admitting “in despiht [*sic*] of all your neglect, I still cling with fondness to our ancient friendship.”⁷³

In November, James K. Polk swept the Electoral College, returning the Democrats to power once again. Young Hickory aimed to accomplish much during his presidency, including limiting federal power in favor of the states, reducing the debt, expanding American territory, and projecting strength abroad through American diplomacy. By his own standards (and the subsequent prognoses of later historians), he accomplished every one of the strict constructionist goals that he set out to achieve. Yet the most lasting action of the term may well said to belong to his predecessor. In 1845, Tyler preemptively annexed Texas into the United States. To his successor, he left the task of enforcing the claim.⁷⁴

Among the first of President Polk’s tasks was the selection of cabinet officers. Young Hickory well remembered the criticisms of, and later disasters that fell upon, Andrew Jackson’s first cabinet. He therefore aimed to assemble a harmonious cast of subordinates. Vice-President George M. Dallas, when consulted about the selections, strongly dissented to one in particular:

⁷³ William R. King to James Buchanan, Nov. 14, 1844, and Jan. 28, 1845, James Buchanan Papers, box 11, folders 13 and 23, and box 12, folder 12, HSP.

⁷⁴ James K. Polk has experienced something of a historical renaissance of late. A good introductory biography is John Seigenthaler, *James K. Polk* (New York: Times Books, 2003), esp. 103-130.

James Buchanan for secretary of state. Dallas had hoped that the Mississippi native Robert J. Walker would be appointed to the office. Dallas thought Buchanan “a most dangerous choice” for the prestigious position, arguably because his ambitious rival hoped to succeed Polk in the nation’s top office. But Polk was probably craftier still. The devious chief executive wanted a pliable cabinet and thought Buchanan the perfect henchman. By the end of his term as president, though, Polk would come to share the reservations both of his mentor Andrew Jackson and his vice-president, grumbling in a diary entry near the end of his presidential term that Buchanan often acted “like an old maid.”⁷⁵

Polk’s observation of Buchanan as an “old maid” has more than a touch of irony to it, since Buchanan had worried about ending up living with one in his letter to Cornelia Roosevelt. But to suggest, as Polk did in his diary, that Buchanan was himself an old maid inverts the traditional gendered understandings of “Mr. Buchanan and his wife.” When in the companionship of William Rufus King, Buchanan did seem the more masculine of the pair. Nevertheless, Buchanan also exhibited undeniably feminine qualities, which were often commented upon by his later observers. John W. Forney, the Buchanan supporter turned disillusioned critic, remembered his former political boss as a “masculine Miss Fribble,” who was the foppish female lead of a popular English play. As with Polk’s old maid comment, Forney seems to have struggled with the ambiguous gendered characteristics of Buchanan. He was at once masculine and feminine: in a sense, a mannish woman. A recent Buchanan biographer has suggested that the “nonshaving Buchanan, who in his portraits has eunuchlike, endomorphic features of body and face as well as the low hairlines characteristic of asexual men

⁷⁵ Augustus C. Buell, *History of Andrew Jackson*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s & Sons, 1904), 2:404; see also Paul F. Boller, *Presidential Anecdotes* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 118; Belohlavek, *George Mifflin Dallas*, 100-103; “Tuesday, 27th February, 1849,” in Milo M. Quaife, ed., *The Diary of James Knox Polk*, 4 vols. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co, 1910), 4:355; John W. Forney, *Anecdotes of Public Men*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873-1881), 1:64-65.

with low levels of testosterone” exhibited “little interest in sex.” Without further evidence, it will be difficult to classify Buchanan definitively as asexual. Nevertheless, these contemporary observations by Polk, Forney, and others suggest the ways in which even ambiguously gendered performances of manhood mattered only in the periphery to political success in antebellum America.⁷⁶

For William Rufus King away in France, the appointment of his close friend to head the state department was welcomed news. Their correspondence resumed in the spring of 1845, with a letter from Buchanan (no longer extant) about the swarm of office seekers who had beseeched him for political appointments. King mused in reply that Buchanan “sent them away charmed with your affability.” With Buchanan serving as secretary of state, their correspondence took on an entirely new character, one in which Buchanan was King’s immediate superior, as well as a personal friend. Buchanan did all that he could to execute the French Minister’s every command, including when King requested to be relieved from his position. The climate of France did not agree with the rheumatic King: “Most sincerely do I wish that we had both remained in the Senate,” he lamented. Buchanan eventually arranged for his honorable release from the position in the fall of 1846, at which time King returned to his native Alabama. Even so, they would not see each other for another two years.⁷⁷

Before that time, King wrestled with the diminished intimacy of his friendship with Buchanan. When his former messmate again fell into another period of epistolary silence, King

⁷⁶ The play referred to by Forney is “Miss in Her Teens; or, *The Medley of Lovers*” (1746) by David Garrick. On Garrick, see Alan Kendall, *David Garrick: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985); on sexual representations of actors in eighteenth-century Britain, see Kristina Straub, “Actors and Homophobia,” in *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theater*, ed. J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah P. Fisk (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1995), 258-80. The speculation about Buchanan’s testosterone levels is offered by Baker, *James Buchanan*, 26.

⁷⁷ William R. King to James Buchanan, April 30, 1845, and April 30, 1846, James Buchanan Papers, box 12, folder 12, and box 13, folder 24, HSP.

chafed and admonished Buchanan that “you might have snatched a few moments to commune with an old Friend, who feels the liveliest in all that concerns you, personally and politically.” When a letter finally did appear, King breathed a gratified sigh of relief, noting that Buchanan’s “silence had continued so long, that I had come to the conclusion that our friendly intercourse was destined to die a natural death.” Yet, throughout their separation abroad, King never lost faith in his old friend. King lauded Secretary Buchanan as the “Atlas of the Administration,” adding that his niece Catherine Parrish Ellis hoped to “hear you deliver your Inaugural from the front of the Capitol in 1849.”⁷⁸

The reason for Buchanan’s silence probably stemmed from the many crises that he faced in the State Department. The most pressing of these related to the war with Mexico that erupted in 1846. Buchanan’s management of the treaty process that ended the war and ceded vast swaths of land from Mexico, while dubious, revealed him to have adopted the martial spirit of the times. From his association with southern messmates, Buchanan likely gleaned a zeal for territorial expansion that only grew with time (his ultimate obsession would be Cuba). On top of the war with Mexico, Buchanan busied himself with the disputed Oregon boundary. President Polk wanted all of the territory for the United States—after all, northern Democrats had elected Polk with the hopes of “54’ 40”, or fight!” But Buchanan feared that England and France might protest the matter, the latter opinion based on intelligence gleaned from King’s many letters from Paris. Buchanan and Polk divided over the issue. Buchanan offered to resign; in return, Polk agreed to offer him a position on the Supreme Court—a post long desired by the Lancaster lawyer—and Buchanan eventually agreed. However, Polk let the matter drop; encouraged by King to stay the course, Buchanan reconsidered. Louis McClane, Buchanan’s presumed

⁷⁸ William R. King to James Buchanan, Nov. 28, 1845, and Jan. 1, 1846, James Buchanan Papers, box 13, folders 10 and 15, HSP; William R. King to James Buchanan, Oct. 5, 1847, *ibid.*, box 16, folder 18.

successor, noted with disgust in a letter to Polk: “I learned that [Buchanan] particularly desired Col. King should succeed him in the Department and sanguine expectations of that which had been raised with the latter gentleman.” If King knew of Buchanan’s plan for his succession, he never mentioned it in his letters to Buchanan.⁷⁹

The final year of the Polk administration predictably focused on who would succeed him (Polk had announced his intention not to run again; besides which, he was debilitated by ill health and did not have much time to live). An unconquerable war spirit afflicted both parties. The Whigs snagged the apolitical former general Zachary Taylor, “Old Rough and Ready,” leaving the Democrats without an obvious candidate. At the convention, they ultimately chose to rely on Lewis Cass of Michigan, although Buchanan once again achieved numerous votes from the assembled delegates. Likewise, for vice-president, King received support for the position, but the party chose General William O. Butler, a high-ranking general in the conflict with Mexico, perhaps as a counteractive force to the Whigs’ choice of Taylor. A Buchanan-King ticket had once again almost come to pass.

The decision to endorse the “popular sovereignty” platform enraged many Northerners in the party, including the ex-president Martin Van Buren. In New York, the so-called “Barnburners,” Van Buren among them, had already left the party, leaving the more conservative “Hunkers” to stand by Cass and Butler. The Barnburners turned their attention to the nascent Free Soil Party, with Van Buren achieving the presidential nomination for 1848. King wrote of his disgust in the nomination, calling Van Buren an “intriguing selfish politician.” For his part,

⁷⁹ Eventually, a compromise line at the forty-ninth parallel settled the matter, preventing war with Britain in the process. Louis McClane to James K. Polk, August 2, 1846, *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, ed. Cutler, 11:260. See also Joseph Georgiana, “The Personal and Political Relationship of James K. Polk and James Buchanan as a Factor in the Oregon Question, 1845-1846” (M.A. thesis, Catholic University, 1970); Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 175-93; Baker, *James Buchanan*, 37-43; and Robert W. Merry, *A Country of Vast Designs: James K. Polk, the Mexican War, and the Conquest of the American Continent* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), *passim*.

Buchanan initially felt betrayed by his party for being passed over. When the Whig Party chose Taylor the following month, though, he changed his tune and quietly looked forward to 1852.⁸⁰

With Polk's one term as president at an end, James Buchanan returned to private life. Over time, his Cincinnatus-like retirement, reminiscent of his childhood hero George Washington, earned him a new moniker: the "Sage of Wheatland" (he would also be called the "Old Public Functionary" and "Old Buck"). In his great home just outside town, Buchanan imitated something of the life of a southern planter. A biography from his presidency observed that Buchanan engaged in the "calm pleasures of country life, at his beautiful home near Lancaster, where he dispensed a Southern-like hospitality to all who came within its limits, and where he himself, always genial and agreeable, was the very life of the home circle." As never before, Buchanan enjoyed the simple pleasures of country life, including the reaction of his many guests to the casks of whiskey he obtained from Jacob Baer's nearby distillery, with its stamp of "Old J. B. Whiskey."⁸¹

All the while, William Rufus King was plotting his return to the Senate from Alabama. A vacancy in 1848—the appointment of Senator Arthur P. Bagby of Alabama as the new Minister to Russia—would ironically give King, a former secretary to the Russian legation during the Monroe administration, his opening. Even four years removed from their Washington

⁸⁰ William R. King to James Buchanan, June 28, 1848, James Buchanan Papers, box 21, folder 21, HSP; Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 204.

⁸¹ "James Buchanan" (1859), Biog. Vol. 9, no. 24, HSP; Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 211. Drinking alcohol was by no means a new development in Buchanan's life. As a senator, he had regularly invited fellow senators, including Daniel Webster, to drink with him and his messmates. The practice continued at Wheatland and in the White House, where the physically robust president was observed to be able outdrink nearly anyone whom he met. Even the curmudgeonly Nathaniel Hawthorne admitted that Buchanan "takes his wine like a true man." Daniel Webster to James Buchanan, Mar. 21, 1835, James Buchanan Papers, box 3, folder 15, HSP; James Buchanan to John McSparran, Feb. 12, 1851, and Buchanan to Harriet Lane, Oct. 15, 1858, James Buchanan and Harriet Lane Johnston Papers, box 5, LC; Philadelphia Press, January 24, 1860, as cited in Klein, *James Buchanan*, 211; and Nathaniel Hawthorne to William D. Ticknor, April 30, 1854, in *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 23 vols., ed. Thomas Woodson et al. (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1962-1994), 17:210-11.

mess, the two men were still regularly considered in the same political breath. As the Democratic editor Francis P. Blair caustically remarked to ex-President Martin Van Buren about King's possible reappointment to the Senate: "Bagby they tell me is to minister to Russia & open the way for King back to the Senate. The latter they say cohabits still with old Buck." Much as Aaron Brown's gossipy letter to Sarah Childress Polk had done four years earlier, Blair's curious choice of the word "cohabits" invoked the idea that King and Buchanan domestic tie as messmates still bound them together politically. While the two men had long stopped living together by 1848, Blair's comment suggests that, at least politically, their "cohabitation" remained as strong as ever.⁸²

Once back in Washington, King found occasion to visit Buchanan and evidently became a regular guest at Wheatland. He became familiar with Buchanan's housekeeper Esther Parker and his niece Harriet Lane. Back in Washington, King was once again chosen President *pro tem* of the Senate. His primary concern was the Senate's deadlock over the newly acquired territories from Mexico. While Clay, Calhoun, and Webster each thundered his views before packed galleries, King steered the debate with skill and aplomb and adroitly presided over a body deeply divided. As the summer months grew longer, the death of President Taylor, the emergence of Stephen Douglas as the floor leader for the various bills, and the growing sectional divide all harbingered ominous tidings. King worried about being branded a political "submersionist [*sic*]" (by which he meant "submissionist"), but he avowed to the husband of his niece Mary Ann Beck: "One thing is certain, I am no disunionist." He also philosophically disagreed with the

⁸² Francis P. Blair to Martin Van Buren, June 16, 1848, *Papers of Martin Van Buren at the Library of Congress* (microform, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960, 35 reels), reel 31.

pronouncements of the secessionist-leaning Nashville Convention in June 1850. Until the bitter end of the debates, he counseled moderation and Union.⁸³

At first, Buchanan expressed great concern over the deadlock in Congress, quoting a letter from King to a concerned correspondent in New York. “To show you the state of feeling in the South,” he wrote, “I shall extract a few sentences from a strictly private letter from Colonel King received within the last week. Every body who knows that gentleman is aware that he is prudent, patriotic & discreet, & has heretofore exerted all his influence to suppress excitement on this subject.” When matters seemed particularly dire, Buchanan traveled to Washington in January, where he spent four weeks “behind the scenes” with King at their old mess on F Street. The time with King was productively spent. Buchanan may even have conceived of the idea of a judicial solution to the question of slavery’s status in the territories during this short stay at the mess; to confidant Robert Tyler, he wrote: “I have been maturing a project for the settlement of the Slavery question; but the time is not yet.” As the debate continued through 1850, however, Buchanan turned his attentions to enjoying country life at Wheatland, inviting King and his niece Catherine Ellis to join him and Harriet Lane at Bedford Springs. When King declined due to the demands of the Senate, Buchanan stopped responding to his letters.⁸⁴

In response, King feigned mortification and begged Buchanan to come back to Washington and things over. “I will however forgive all,” he wrote, “if you come to Washington and spend a few weeks with me. I am at our old establishment on F Street, quite alone and can furnish you with tolerably good quarters.” Buchanan never visited. King persisted in his

⁸³ William R. King to Dr. Alanson Saltmarsh, Aug. 25, 1850, William Rufus King Papers, ADAH.

⁸⁴ James Buchanan to C.L. Ward, Jan. 22, 1850, Buchanan Papers, N-YHS (the “strictly private letter” from King is dated Jan. 13, 1850 and available in the James Buchanan Papers, box 20, folder 9, HSP). For his trip to Washington in January and February 1850, see James Buchanan to Robert Tyler, Feb. 25, 1850, Gilder Lehrman Collection, N-YHS.

customary half-mock indignation at his friend's lack of reply. As a last resort, King played into Buchanan's presidential ambitions in a letter from October 1851. "Perhaps you suppose I have so little influence that my Friendship is of minor importance," King mused. "Do not be deceived. I am the only man who can beat you in Alabama; and unless you pay more attention to me, I will have the ticket...." The ploy worked; Buchanan replied almost immediately.⁸⁵

In 1852, the two men resumed their correspondence over the following year, with the express purpose of conducting Buchanan's indirect bid for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. King again invited Buchanan to visit with him in Washington, but he eventually rescinded the offer as impolitic, with the Democratic Party convention being held in nearby Baltimore. The convention proved to be the most bittersweet yet for Buchanan. Lewis Cass, the party's standard-bearer four years earlier, took an early lead. After twenty-one ballots, however, Buchanan emerged as the leading contender for the first time in his political career. The balloting continued, with no single candidate gaining the necessary two-thirds majority (Cass made a late comeback). In an unexpected turn of events, the Democracy turned down Cass and Buchanan and instead chose Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire, a dark horse candidate in the mold of James K. Polk. The strategy worked in 1844 with Polk, the delegates reasoned, why not again in 1852? For the vice-president spot, the party leaders quickly chose King, who though gravely ill, merited the honor of the office. Knowing his connection to the Buchanan wing of the party, the convention's selection of King's was meant to be a conciliatory gesture. Certainly, Pierce himself knew of the close friendship between King and Buchanan, since his New Hampshire confidante, Edmund Burke, had written of the connection in a June 1852 letter: "I

⁸⁵ William R. King to James Buchanan, June 28, 1848, June 19, 1850, Aug. 4, 1850, Jan. 12, 1851, Oct. 14, 1851, James Buchanan Papers, box 18, folder 18, box 20, folders 21 and 22, and box 21, folders 1 and 21, HSP.

think we did right in putting King on the ticket. You know he is Buchanan's bosom friend and thus a great and powerful interest is conciliated."⁸⁶

Edmund Burke's observation that King was Buchanan's "bosom friend" reveals the importance of intimate male friendship to the successful maintenance of the Democratic Party platform by the early 1850s. Burke correctly articulated an undeniable fact: no Democrat could hope to be elected without the support of the partisans of Buchanan and King. Their bachelor power, which originated in the humble congressional mess two decades earlier, had now expanded into something much more powerful: a controlling share in the national political game. With the former leaders of the Democracy passing from the scene, King and Buchanan were among the last of the national leaders. These two old bachelors had become venerable statesmen worthy of the nation's respect: their former enemies no longer referred them derisively as "Aunt Nancy" or "Mr. Buchanan and his wife," and even the formerly vitriolic Aaron V. Brown of Tennessee now warmly supported both Buchanan and King. As chums and bosom friends, King and Buchanan had managed to become a controlling interest in the Democratic Party by 1852, and given the decline of the opposing Whig Party, this made James Buchanan and William Rufus King among the most politically powerful men in America. Ironically, then, the news of the Democratic convention marked the beginning of the end of their friendship. While Buchanan and King exerted major influence in Democratic Party politics, they did not control it. In 1852, only one of the pair would be chosen for office, and that person would not be Buchanan, but his "wife," William Rufus King.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Edmund Burke to Franklin Pierce, June 6, 1852, in "Some Papers of Franklin Pierce, 1852-1862," *American Historical Review* 10, no. 1 (Oct. 1904), 114.

⁸⁷ Buchanan likewise regarded Brown as an ally. As president, he appointed him to the prized patronage role of Postmaster General.

Stung by his own defeat, Buchanan could only muster the most lukewarm support for King's nomination. To Robert Tyler, son of the ex-president, he predicted that King "would make a safe and excellent president." To another correspondent, Buchanan coolly stated: "Col. King is every thing he ought to be & I shall give the ticket a cordial support," while to the old Jacksonian Cave Johnson, he replied with hardly more enthusiasm: "Both personally and politically General Pierce and Colonel King are highly acceptable to myself." With the election of Pierce and King in the fall, Buchanan resumed his praise for his former messmate. He may have been angling for a cabinet position in the new administration. To the new president-elect, Buchanan wrote that King was "among the best, purest and most consistent public men I have ever known, and is also a sound judging and discreet counsellor [*sic*]. You might rely with implicit confidence upon his information, especially in regard to the Southern states...." (Pierce mostly seems to have ignored the letter). Disillusioned and thoroughly tired of politicking, Buchanan predicted to a friend in New York that he would "gracefully & gradually retire from public view."⁸⁸

In contrast to Buchanan's lukewarm support, King never wavered in his support of his old friend. "No Friend of yours could feel more mortification at your failure to obtain the nomination of the Baltimore convention than I did," King wrote to Buchanan from the Senate in June 1852. The convention had disgusted him and Catherine Parrish Ellis both, who "mourned over your defeat," King reported. Even as he publicly supported Pierce, King made his opinions known privately. "I would have greatly preferred our Friend Buchanan," he confided to Robert

⁸⁸ James Buchanan to Robert Tyler, June 8, 1852, in *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, 3 vols., ed. Lyon Gardiner Tyler (Richmond: Whittett and Shepperson, 1885; reprint: New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 2:498-99; James Buchanan to [???], June 11, 1852, James Buchanan Papers, box 53, folder 6, HSP; James Buchanan to Cave Johnson, June 24, 1852, in *Works of James Buchanan*, ed. Moore, 8:450; James Buchanan to Franklin Pierce, December 11, 1852, in *ibid*, 8:493-99; James Buchanan to C.L. Ward, Nov. 16, 1852, James Buchanan Papers, N-YHS.

Tyler in the aftermath of the convention, but “he was set aside.” For his part, the new vice-president felt little excitement over the new president. To Buchanan he wrote, “I am not one of those whom he takes into his confidence, for not a single line have I received from him since his nomination.” When Pierce also passed over Buchanan for Secretary of State, King grew further disillusioned. Although suffering from terrible health, King offered one final strategy for his old friend’s election in 1856: be a “*Northern man with Southern principles*.”⁸⁹

Although King would not live to see the day, Buchanan successfully achieved the candidacy of his party and the presidency with precisely that dough-face formula. In 1856, Buchanan ran not only on his record, but implicitly on those of his close allies through the years. Buchanan’s supporters understood his many close friendships to be an asset rather than a liability to his presidential aspirations. The public commentary on his bachelorhood also continued throughout his life, sometimes in the form of gossip, and most fully discussed during his campaign for the presidency in 1856. A Democratic propagandist from the campaign noted that Buchanan was “the friend of Levi Woodbury, the companion of Wm. R. King, of Roane, of Silas Wright, of John C. Calhoun, of Felix Grundy, and of all that sterling race of men who adorned the era in which he was an actor.” Neither did the campaign biography of Buchanan, written by the New York editor and slavery apologist Rushmore G. Horton, avoid the topic of Buchanan’s friendship with King. In fact, Horton embraced it, quoting a letter from an anonymous visitor to Wheatland: “I was much gratified in finding in his library a likeness of the late Vice-President King, whom he loved (and who did not?) He declared that he was the purest public man that he ever knew, and that during his intimate acquaintance of thirty years he had never known him to

⁸⁹ William R. King to James Buchanan, June 12, 1852, James Buchanan Papers, box 22, folder 24; HSP; William R. King to Robert Tyler, June 28, 1852, William Rufus King Papers, ADAH; William R. King to James Buchanan, Jan. 16, 1852, May 13, 1852, and Dec. 13, 1852, James Buchanan Papers, box 22, folder 15, box 21, folder 32, and box 23, folder 2, HSP.

perform a selfish act.” Horton was not alone in valorizing Buchanan’s bachelorhood. In one popular cartoon from the time, a contemplative Buchanan is shown examining his “bachelor’s coat,” hoping it would still be serviceable in the future.⁹⁰

By contrast, his Republican Party opponents bashed Buchanan for his support of slavery. Numerous political cartoons depicted Buchanan in league with southern slaveholders. In one Republican pamphlet, the author cataloged thirteen instances since 1837 where Buchanan supported slavery in some form. While the Republican propagandists aimed to show an audience sympathetic to anti-slavery causes Buchanan’s voting record, the pamphlet also neatly connected Buchanan’s successful rise in national politics with his association with Southerners. It is no coincidence that three years after he began his mess with William Rufus King, Edward Lucas, and Bedford Brown, Buchanan had begun publicly to espouse a more ardent pro-slavery position, one that he undoubtedly hoped would carry him to the White House in the future. From his support of the Senate’s gag rule to his support of “popular sovereignty” in 1850, Buchanan consistently showed his non-opposition to the spread of slavery. He was, as King had once predicted, a “safe northern man,” the quintessential dough-face so hated by northern abolitionists.⁹¹

The final months of King’s life were marked by sickness and failing health. He now relied on his niece Catherine Parrish Ellis to write letters on his behalf. “He requests me to inform you of his proposed departure, and of his sincere desire to see you before he leave,” Ellis

⁹⁰ Rushmore G. Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan, Late Minister to England and Formerly Minister to Russia, Senator and Representative in Congress, and Secretary of State: Including The Most Important of His State Papers* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1856), 424; “Short Answers to Reckless Fabrications, Against the Democratic Candidate for President, James Buchanan” (Philadelphia, 1856). On Buchanan’s political rhetoric, see also Robert E. Terrill, “James Buchanan: Romancing the Union,” in *Before the Rhetorical Presidency*, ed. Martin J. Medhurst (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 2008): 166-193.

⁹¹ “For True Democrats” (s.i.: s.n., 1856), Afro-Americana (#3735), Library Company of Philadelphia; William R. King to James Buchanan, Dec. 13, 1852, James Buchanan Papers, box 23, folder 2, HSP.

wrote to Buchanan on New Year's Day 1853, adding, "Uncle desires me to give you his affectionate remembrances." King and Ellis headed to Matanzas, Cuba, in the hopes of finding more salubrious air in the sugar cane plantations, but the change of climate did little for his tuberculosis. With special dispensation from Congress, King took the oath of office of Vice-President of the United States on March 4, 1853, the only such executive ever to do so on foreign soil. One observer noted that ceremony, "although simple, was very sad and impressive and will never be forgotten by any who were present." King returned not long after to Selma, where he died on April 14, 1853, having barely served a month in his new office.⁹²

William Rufus King's death deeply affected James Buchanan. To the South Carolina Democrat Francis W. Pickens, Buchanan mourned: "I have never known a purer or a better man." Buchanan recounted how he "lived with him for many years as a brother," where King was "always the same amiable, kind-hearted, sound-judging and consistent gentlemen." Buchanan had known many men in politics, but he "would have rather have taken [King's] advice upon any subject, personal or political" than that any other man. Buchanan also continued to honor King's memory long after his death. In May 1859, President Buchanan traveled to the University of North Carolina to deliver the school's commencement address. Buchanan's motivations were a mixture of political and personal. On the one hand, he hoped to address citizens of a state whose loyalties to the Union were still strong, but on the other, he was fulfilling a promise he had made many years prior to visit his close friend's alma mater. King himself had twice been invited to speak before the Philosophic Society, but he never found occasion to do so (he did sit for a portrait that would have been hanging in its meeting hall

⁹² Catherine Parrish Ellis to James Buchanan, Jan. 1, 1853, James Buchanan Papers, box 23, folder 4, HSP; *National Intelligencer*, April 8, 1853.

during Buchanan's visit). More than six years after King's death, then, Buchanan fulfilled a long cherished wish of his once political partner and Washington companion.⁹³

* * * * *

James Buchanan did not forget William Rufus King in the years ahead. Through his connection to King's niece Catherine Parrish Ellis, in particular, Buchanan kept alive his friend's memory. During Buchanan's presidency, Ellis had been a regular guest at the White House. After the war, Buchanan wrote to Ellis and said this of her uncle: "Of all the men I have ever known, I was the most devotedly attached to him, and I have often thought it may have been a kind dispensation of Providence to take him from earth before the commencement of the war." In October 1866, Ellis actually visited Buchanan at Wheatland, and by all accounts, the two enjoyed an agreeable time together. In December 1867, Buchanan composed his final letter to Ellis. Though written to King's niece, Buchanan may as well have been addressing his long since gone friend: "I have ever, since our first acquaintance, felt for you a warm affection and a high respect. Your conduct has always been worthy of your uncle who was one of the purest and best men that ever lived."⁹⁴

In spite of this retrospective gloss of William Rufus King, James Buchanan was surprisingly loose in caring for the correspondence exchanged with his "most devotedly

⁹³ James Buchanan to Francis W. Pickens, July 14, 1853, James Buchanan and Harriet Lane Johnston Papers, box 5, folder 18, LC; Philip Auchampaugh, "A Forgotten Journey of An Antebellum President: The Trip and Addresses of James Buchanan Delivered During His Journey to the Commencement of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1859" (Richmond, Va.: privately printed, 1935). On the portrait collection of the Di-Phi Societies, see Reckford, "The Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies portraits, 1795-1868"; and George T. Blackburn II, Roger N. Kirkman, and Joseph K. L. Reckford, ed., "The Di & Phi Portrait Index: Catalogue of the Portraits of the Dialectic and Philanthropic Literary Societies at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill" (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Dialectic and Philanthropic Society Foundation, 1980).

⁹⁴ James Buchanan to Catherine Parrish Ellis, June 30, 1866, James Buchanan Papers, box 4, folder 11, DCL; Buchanan to Ellis, Dec. 14, 1867, *James Buchanan and Harriet Lane Johnston Papers* (microfilm, 4 reels, Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, 1977), reel 2.

attached” friend. In a newly discovered letter from November 26, 1866, written to one “Master Harrison Wright” of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, the elderly Buchanan replied that he was unable to comply with Wright’s request for an autograph of King. “I have preserved none of his letters except two or three upon important subjects which I should be unwilling to mutilate,” he declared. Buchanan then added: “I should be glad to oblige you, and had you asked me for his autograph a month ago, before I had completed the task of arranging my papers & destroying all useless letters this would have been in my power.” As the many surviving letters between the two men suggest, however, Buchanan had not recently destroyed his letters from King; in fact, he had saved many more than “two or three” of them (I estimate that there a total of fifty-four letters from King’s still extant). Perhaps the young Master Wright’s letter jogged the aging Buchanan’s memory and prompted him to search through his collection of letters, for a curious addendum has been added to King’s letter of May 14, 1844, the same letter containing the intimate expression of friendship that provided the epigraph at the start of this chapter. Written in Buchanan’s hand, the note reads: “The conclusion & signature cut off & sent as an autograph to Master Harrison Wright of Wilkesbarre.” Since this second letter to Wright does not survive, we do not know what the conclusion said, or whether Buchanan actually sent the fragment to Wright. However, it is curious that Buchanan would choose this one letter to cut off and send as an autograph to the young Master Wright. Perhaps, and contrary to the content of his letter to Wright, Buchanan was well aware of the many letters in his possession from King and chose this letter in particular to send. Like so much about the relationship between James Buchanan and William Rufus King, the truth of the matter may never fully be known.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ A digital copy of the letter from James Buchanan to Harrison Wright, Nov. 26, 1866, is available through Heritage Auctions (item 36055), at <<http://historical.ha.com/itm/autographs/james-buchanan-autograph-letter-signed/a/692-36055.s>>. Harrison Wright may have been a member of the Wright Family, who flourished in greater southeastern Pennsylvania; see the letters from Harrison Wright to

The stewardship over the correspondence of James Buchanan and William Rufus King soon passed to the next generation. After Buchanan's death in 1868, his niece, Harriet Lane Johnston (recently married to Henry Elliot Johnston), wrote to Ellis, with the hope of obtaining additional correspondence to pass along to the first proposed Buchanan biographer. Ellis dutifully replied, though she was unsure of the state of the various letters stored at her family's Alabama plantation: "There was at King's Bend a large package of letters from Mr. Buchanan to my Uncle, and I hope they may not have been destroyed in the raid which was made on the place at the surrender." No further correspondence exists on this topic, which suggests either that the invading soldiers of the Union Army destroyed these letters, or that Ellis successfully retrieved the package and sent it to Johnston (who perhaps then destroyed them herself). Yet another plausible explanation is that some of their letters were among those destroyed by a warehouse fire during the late 1890s. But one thing is for sure: James Buchanan's niece continued to think fondly of William Rufus King's niece, with Johnston gratefully accepting a photograph of Ellis as late as 1899. As the later connections between their nieces and nephews suggest, James Buchanan and William Rufus King shared a union in which friendship and family productively intertwined for the betterment of one another, and perhaps they hoped by extension, their party, and the nation as a whole.⁹⁶

Samuel G. Wright, Wright Family Papers, box 5, Hagley Museum and Library. For the letter from King to Buchanan, see James Buchanan to William Rufus King, May 11, 1844, James Buchanan Papers, box 11, folder 6, HSP.

⁹⁶ James Buchanan to Harriet Lane Johnston, Oct. 27, 1866, James Buchanan Family Papers, box 3, folder 197, LCHS; Catherine Parrish Ellis to Harriet Lane Johnston, Sept. 16, 1868, *James Buchanan and Harriet Lane Johnston Papers*, reel 4; and Harriet Lane Johnston to William U. Hensel, Feb. 27, 1899, Wheatland-Klein Collection, box 1, folder 4, LCHS. Buchanan also most willingly wrote letters of introduction for Ellis; see James Buchanan to Lady Clarendon, May 3, 1857, Alfred White Van Sinderen Collection, box 1, folder 28, YUL. On the warehouse fire, see Moore, ed., *Works of James Buchanan*, 1:vii. Most of Buchanan's letters to King were most likely because Buchanan instructed King to burn them. In one letter, King noted, "I read your kind letter attentively and then committed it to the flames, as you requested" and in another letter from 1852, King felt compelled to add in his postscript: "Your letter is in ashes" (William R. King to James Buchanan, Feb. 28, 1846, Dec. 13, 1852, James Buchanan Papers,

The title of this chapter nods in the direction of contemporary gossip about King and Buchanan, though not in the way of those who conceived it. While bachelorhood was a defining characteristic of both men's lives, in their eschewal of traditional marriage King and Buchanan did not exclude other forms of marriage. Indeed, King and Buchanan participated in a kind of political marriage, one formed at first of convenience, which eventually turned into something more permanent. In their Bachelor's mess, the two men encountered the political exigencies of the day without sacrificing their desire for gentlemanly companionship. The many connections that they forged among members of their two families, moreover, illustrate the sustained power of their relationship. In the unusual terms of political marriage between two bachelors, William Rufus King and James Buchanan united in a reciprocal relationship that would bring each man to the highest of executive offices. At least in terms of presidential politics, the decade of the 1850s may well have been the era of the bachelor.

box 13, folder 20, and box 23, folder 2, HSP). After King's death, Buchanan wrote to William Woodson King and received the obedient reply, "The letter addressed to Mr. K. has been *disposed* of according to your *direction*" (William W. King to Buchanan, Mar. 19, 1853, *ibid.*, box 23, folder 13). On the history of the preservation of the James Buchanan papers, see Homer T. Rosenberger, "Protecting the Buchanan Papers," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 72, no. 3 (1970): 137-169.

CHAPTER 2:
FRANK PIERCE AND THE BOWDOIN BOYS

“Well; I have found him, here in Rome, the whole of my early friend, and even better than I used to know him.”

--Nathaniel Hawthorne, April 19, 1859, *The French and Italian Notebooks*

The ancient city of Rome might be considered an unusual place for the reunion of an ex-President and America's most famous romancer, but it was there in March 1859 that Franklin Pierce and Nathaniel Hawthorne saw each other for the first time in nearly seven years. Franklin Pierce and his wife Jane Means Appleton Pierce had been traveling the European continent, seeking more healthful climates for Jane's frail frame. Nathaniel Hawthorne and his wife Sophia Amelia Peabody Hawthorne were also touring the continent for health reasons. That the two old friends, who had first met on a stagecoach on the way to Brunswick, Maine, should reconnect in a city full of the ruins of a fallen empire was fitting, as the best days of their respective careers had also passed. Ironically, their close friendship had contributed a great deal of hardship to their lives: Hawthorne's *Life of Pierce* (1852) had precipitated a decline of his literary reputation that never recovered in his own lifetime, and for Pierce, his old friend's efforts had helped to launch him into the office that offered him only perpetual mourning.¹

Franklin Pierce has often been depicted as a tragic figure. Indeed, his most recent biographer does not stretch the evidence in describing him as a martyr: the interpretation

¹ The friendship of Franklin Pierce and Nathaniel Hawthorne has long been known to literary scholars and biographers of Hawthorne. Among the most helpful accounts of their relationship may be found in James R. Mellow, *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1980); Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem Is My Dwelling Place: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1991); Brenda Wineapple, *Hawthorne: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2003); and Philip McFarland, *Hawthorne in Concord* (New York: Grove Press, 2004). The definitive edition of Hawthorne's writings and letters has been meticulously prepared as Thomas Woodson et al, ed., *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 23 vols. (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1962-1994).

effectively highlights the many losses that defined so much of his personal and political life. Although the combined tragedies of the deaths of his three children cannot be equaled, Pierce also experienced the loss of all his male friends during his lifetime. Beginning with the death of his classmate Zenas Caldwell in 1825 and continuing periodically during the next four decades, Pierce experienced the loss of one friendship after another, including those with Jonathan Cilley of Maine, John Parker Hale of New Hampshire, Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Death affected Pierce in varying ways: one loss nearly destroyed all Pierce's appetite for politics (Cilley); another loss was painfully exasperated by its roots in political disagreement (Hale); a third stemmed from ultimately irreconcilable differences over the political questions that tore the nation asunder (Davis); and the final loss of Hawthorne signaled Pierce's own impending mortality.²

As it had been for James Buchanan and William Rufus King, male friendship was a defining aspect of Franklin Pierce's political success. But unlike that duo, Franklin Pierce could

² Franklin Pierce has received fewer scholarly treatments compared to James Buchanan. The first full-length biography is still commonly cited as the authoritative account of the man; see Roy F. Nichols, *Franklin Pierce: Young Hickory of the Granite Hills* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1931). Since Nichols's biography, periodic updates have appeared, with notable contributions in the last thirty years; see esp. Larry Gara, *The Presidency of Franklin Pierce* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1991); Peter A. Wallner, *Franklin Pierce*, 2 vols. (Concord, N.H.: Plaidswede Publishing, 2004-2007); Garry Boulard, *The Expatriation of Franklin Pierce: The Story of a President and the Civil War* (New York: iUniverse, 2006); Michael F. Holt, *Franklin Pierce* (New York: Times Books, 2010); and Thomas J. Rowland, *Franklin B. Pierce: The Twilight of Jacksonian Democracy* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2012). Two highly useful bibliographic aids to Franklin Pierce materials are provided by Irving Sloan, ed., *Franklin Pierce, 1804-1869: Chronology-Documents-Bibliographic Aids* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1968); and Wilfred J. Bisson, ed., *Franklin Pierce: A Bibliography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993). Published inventories and transcriptions of letters by Franklin Pierce and his relatives (including his wife Jane Appleton Means Pierce) are likewise valuable; see esp. Perlman O. Ray, ed., "Some Papers of Franklin Pierce, 1852-1862," *American Historical Review* 10, no. 1 and 2 (Oct. 1904 and Jan. 1905): 110-127, 350-70; Wilmer R. Leech, *Calendar of the Papers of Franklin Pierce* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917); Norman F. Boas, ed., *Jane M. Pierce (1806-1863): The Pierce-Aiken Papers* (Stonington, Conn.: Seaport Autographs, 1983); Boas, ed., *Jane M. Pierce (1806-1863): The Pierce-Aiken Papers Supplement* (Mystic, Conn.: Seaport Autographs, 1989); Carl Irving Bell, *Persistent Patriot: The New Hampshire Life and Letters of Franklin Pierce: The Pre-Presidential Years* (Concord, N.H.: New Hampshire Political Library, 2005).

never quite find a single man on whom to rest his political fortunes, and he resisted too close a connection with southern members of his party. Instead, he embraced his commitment to the national principles of the Democratic Party. Pierce rarely thought instrumentally; he relied upon those men he trusted personally, often drawing upon shared military experiences as the litmus test of worth. He was also principled to an unusual degree; he freely admitted to being a friend of Jefferson Davis during the Civil War and beyond. Unlike ex-President Buchanan, ex-President Pierce was an outspoken critic of the Lincoln administration—he was falsely accused of conspiracy by Secretary of State Seward—and the Republican Party during the Civil War, though this difference did not stop Pierce from sending a famously heartfelt note of sympathy to President Lincoln upon the death of his son Willie in 1862. By the time of Pierce's death in 1869, he was perhaps the most hated former chief executive (Buchanan being a close second).³

Although the differences between Pierce and Buchanan are noteworthy, the greatest similarity in the way each practiced politics can be seen in their cultivation and reliance upon male friendship. As Pierce's most recent biographer has aptly concluded: "Pierce preferred the company of men and shared many of the nineteenth-century pursuits that characterized manliness," while to "his male companions, Pierce was always an interesting, an engaging and a loyal friend."⁴ While we know very little about Buchanan's friendships at Dickinson College, the surviving correspondence of Pierce and his many notable classmates at Bowdoin College suggests the vital sustenance such relationships provided. Both men entered the profession of the law and turned to politics as a natural extension of this involvement. But whereas Buchanan embraced the homosocial conviviality of Lancaster politics, Franklin Pierce arose to political

³ For Pierce's public disagreements with the Lincoln administration, see Boulard, *Expatriation of Franklin Pierce*, esp. 202-23; see also Franklin Pierce to Abraham Lincoln, Mar. 4, 1862, Abraham Lincoln Papers, 1774-1948, LC, available through the *Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress*, at <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/malhome.html>>.

⁴ Wallner, *Franklin Pierce*, 2:377.

prominence in large part because of the power of his family name in New Hampshire. His father, Benjamin Pierce, was elected governor of the Granite State at a time when Franklin held a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. From there, Franklin Pierce naturally turned his eyes toward the Senate, in which body he held a position until the early 1840s. His participation in the war with Mexico arose from his strong desire to serve his country and arguably, to follow in the tradition of his father and several brothers. His selection as the presidential nominee in 1852 came as a great surprise to both Pierce and the nation. Once elected, he would assemble a cabinet that espoused friendship with each other to an unprecedented degree in presidential administrations hitherto. The remarkable farewell letters between Pierce and his cabinet demonstrate how the bonds of male friendship mattered to in the formation and sustenance of his presidential administration. Finally, in his later life renewal of friendship with Nathaniel Hawthorne, Franklin Pierce turned for emotional support to the comfort of his college days and attempted to resurrect a relationship that had served both men well in the previous decades. Its untimely termination, like so many of Pierce's relationships, stands as a somber coda and an apt reflection of the great sorrows that had come to afflict the nation during the Civil War.

The Young Birch

Although no longer the frontier by 1800, New Hampshire remained quite distant from the center of commercial activity in New England. Before the era of the railroad and the telegraph, farmers in New Hampshire continued to rely on rural centers of activity for trade and news. One such place was farming community of Hillsborough, some twenty-five miles from the state capital in Concord. In these rural communities, family was the primary unit of social organization. From the family unit came civic and religious organization, the famed town

meeting and the congregational church being two such by-products. Early homes were primitive—log cabins were common—but economic prosperity was possible. Over time, a farmer could hope to raise his stake in life, and especially through his children, improve the family's lot.⁵

In many ways, Benjamin Pierce exemplified the upward mobility available in early America. Born in 1757 to a farming family in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, the young Benjamin Pierce became embroiled in the initial contests that became the American Revolution and served until its conclusion, reaching the rank of general. After the war, General Pierce moved to Hillsborough, New Hampshire, established both a tavern and a farm, married, and started a family. From his second wife, Anna Kendrick, came five sons, including Franklin, born in 1804. Over time, Benjamin Pierce ascended the ranks of politics in the state. He would ultimately be elected governor in 1827 as a Jacksonian Democrat. From his father, Franklin Pierce would inherit not only an undying patriotism, but also the weighty legacy of the Revolutionary generation. Benjamin Pierce also believed strongly in the value of education. Accordingly, he proposed to send each of his children to primary schools and eventually on to college. Franklin Pierce first attended a local school in Hillsborough, followed by the Hancock Academy, at which he boarded. By 1820, the sixteen-year-old Pierce was prepared to enter college.⁶

⁵ For the proceeding generation, see Philip J. Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970); and for a look at early nineteenth-century New Hampshire, see Wesley G. Balla, "Inheriting the Revolution: Benjamin Pierce's World, Ideals, and Legacy," *Historical New Hampshire* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 7-22.

⁶ The children of Benjamin Pierce included several other notable figures besides Franklin Pierce. Most notably, Benjamin Kendrick Pierce became a career soldier, rising to the rank of brevet general and achieving lasting fame for his services in the Florida campaign; see Louis H. Burbey, *Our Worthy Commander: The Life and Times of Benjamin K. Pierce in Whose Honor Fort Pierce Was Named* (Fort Pierce, Fla.: Indian River Community College Press, 1976). On Franklin Pierce's early education, see Wallner, *Franklin Pierce*, 1:3-15.

The novelist Henry James once described Bowdoin as the quintessential “country college,” but the relative newcomer to American higher education had more pluck and promise than wealth and standing when Franklin Pierce matriculated there in 1820. Nevertheless, Bowdoin College during Franklin Pierce’s time there featured an ensemble of classmates that would include leading figures in the decades ahead. Among Pierce’s classmates were Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and his brother Stephen, William Pitt Fessenden, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Horatio Bridge, John Parker Hale, and Jonathan Cilley. Two competing literary societies divided the students’ attention. The older and perhaps more prestigious of the two was the Federalist-leaning Peucinian Society, whose members included Henry Longfellow and Alfred Mason (Hawthorne’s roommate). The Athenaeum Society, more Democratic in its principles, counted Stephen Longfellow, Bridge, Pierce, Hale, and Hawthorne among its ranks. Another organization claimed the young Pierce’s affections: the Bowdoin Cadets. About the band of young soldiers, Pierce wrote to his brother-in-law General John McNeil in April 1822: “I had the pleasure of seeing the Cadets, when they were at Boston last season was much pleased with their appearance. They are the best looking young men I ever saw.” In the spring of 1823, both Longfellows joined the Bowdoin Cadets, now led by the ambitious Pierce, in preparing for military drill. A favorite professor, Parker Cleaveland, sent a “particular request” for the cadets to parade by his house. A month later, though, the cadets disbanded, never to march again on the college green.⁷

Prior to their dispersal, Benjamin Pierce expressed great concern over Franklin’s involvement with the Cadets. In one of the few surviving letters to his son from 1823, Benjamin

⁷ Henry James, *Hawthorne* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1879), 20; reprint, New York: Library of America, 1984); Franklin Pierce to John McNeil, April 12, 1822, Edward S. and Mary Stillman Harkness Manuscript Collection (MssColl 1318), Vol. 17, NYPL; Calhoun, *Longfellow*, 36-37; Thompson, *Young Longfellow*, 38-39. The books of the society’s library also attracted members: see *Catalogue of the Library of the Athenaeum Society of Bowdoin College, August 1834* (Brunswick, Me., 1838).

admonished his son that “no time should be lost for March or merriment.” Franklin’s younger brother Charles Grandison Pierce, meanwhile, was likely jealous of Franklin. “I am informed you have been appointed an officer at Brunswick,” he added in one family letter before demanding further details. Franklin gladly complied: “The students last term concluded that to have a company establish here was to kill two or three birds with one stone, for by that mean they might at the same time have exercise amusement and instruction.” The aspect of “amusement” should not be easily dismissed; for, the intimate friendships engendered by the Bowdoin Cadets would last for an unusually long period beyond the young men’s college years.⁸

Despite his concerns for his son, even Benjamin Pierce understood the value of the camaraderie offered by close male friendship. “I hope you have an agreeable Chum and good masters and that you may be happy,” he wrote to Franklin at the start of his college course and further noted that the son of a family friend “said he thought he should be willing to Chum with you.” Indeed, Franklin found many “Chums” at Bowdoin. After Pierce and Hawthorne met on that stagecoach ride to Brunswick in September 1821, they formed an immediate connection. Numerous other diversions, to taverns and in the countryside alike, bonded the young men together. “Hawthorne and Pierce were instinctively drawn together,” wrote John S.C. Abbott in an essay commemorating the Bowdoin class of 1825. “They became intimate and life-long friends.” It would probably not go too far to describe their relationship as a pair of brothers, Pierce the older and Hawthorne the younger. They would continue their friendship, on and off, for decades to come.⁹

⁸ Benjamin Pierce to Franklin Pierce, June 5, 1823, Franklin Pierce Papers, box 1, folder 1, NHHS.

⁹ Benjamin Pierce to Franklin Pierce, Oct. 19, 1820, Franklin Pierce Papers, box 1, folder 1, NHHS; John S.C. Abbot, “Bowdoin College—Nathaniel Hawthorne” (1875), in *Hawthorne in His Own Times: A Biographical Chronicle of His Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates*, Ronald A. Bosco and Jillmarie Murphy, ed. (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2007), 157. About Jonathan Cilley, Abbot thought him “probably Hawthorne’s most intimate friend in

The pull of male friendship directed Franklin Pierce's course after college. At the request of another classmate, Zenas Caldwell, Pierce took up a teaching position in Hebron, New Hampshire. In an 1825 letter addressed "Dear Chum," Pierce reassured Caldwell that the "friendly feelings which I am confident you have ever entertained for me...and above all, the relation in which we stood to each other during our last year in college was calculated to endear you to me by the strongest ties of friendship." Caldwell, who pursued preaching with youthful zeal, attempted to impress the importance of religion upon his friend. Caldwell succumbed to illness in December 1826, but Pierce and his classmates would not soon forget their young preacher.¹⁰

After a stint as an apprentice in a law office, Pierce spent the next several years living at his family's manse in Hillsborough. From there, he practiced the legal craft. He began to dress better, too ("Pumps which will fit you *are just the thing*," he wrote to his clothier). In short, the life of a young attorney suited Pierce. The son of a respected general and political figure, Pierce

the class," while others of Hawthorne's future literary colleagues were less intimate. After the publication of *Twice-Told Tales* in 1837, Hawthorne wrote to Henry W. Longfellow with the regret: "We were not, it is true, so well acquainted in college that I can plead an absolute right to inflict my 'twice-told' tediousness upon you; but I have often regretted that we were not better known to each other." Indeed, Longfellow never felt that he understood Hawthorne, thinking him one of the "the most secretive man that he ever knew." Moreover, Longfellow paid hardly any attention to Franklin Pierce; instead, he would strengthen his friendship with others, notably Charles Sumner (see chapter 4). Frank Preston Stearns, *Cambridge Sketches* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1905), 64-65; Nathaniel Hawthorne to Henry W. Longfellow, Mar. 7, 1837, *Life of Longfellow*, ed. Longfellow, 1:250; "Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales," *North American Review* XLV (July 1837): 59-73; Hawthorne to Longfellow, June 19, 1837, *Life of Longfellow*, ed. Longfellow, 1:255; Thompson, Young Longfellow, 245-46. See also Peter A. Wallner, "Franklin Pierce and Bowdoin College Associates Hawthorne and Hale," *Historical New Hampshire* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 23-44.

¹⁰ Franklin Pierce to John McNeil, Jan. 10, [1824], Franklin Pierce Papers, box 1, folder 1, NHHS; see also Franklin Pierce to Zenas Caldwell, Jan. 15 and July 16, 1825, in Stephen M. Vail, *Life in Earnest; or, Memoirs and Remains of Rev. Zenas Caldwell* (Boston: J.P. Magee, 1855), 77-79 (the original letters do not survive). See also the retrospective comments in Franklin Pierce to Rev. Sprague, [n.d., ca. 1860]; and William H. Codman to Franklin Pierce, June 14, 1852; Franklin Pierce Papers, box 2, folders 17, 24, NHHS; and Pierce to Rev. W.B. Sprague, Dec. 27, 1860, Franklin Pierce Letters and Documents, NYPL: "To have complied with your request, by writing a Sketch of my early friend, class-mate and room-mate in College,—the late Rev. Zenas Caldwell would have been a welcome task—a true labor of love, but, as your volume was passing through the press, it was too late, before I could find a day to devote to it."

naturally adapted to society in Concord. Perhaps his closest friend during this time was his Bowdoin classmate George Washington Pierce (no relation to the Pierces of Hillsborough), with whom he began a regular correspondence. Together, the two men pledged to remain lifelong bachelors (Bowdoin classmates Nathaniel Hawthorne and Jonathan Cilley had made a similar wager in 1824, with a prize of Madeira wine going to the last one to marry). The two Pierces only reluctantly dissolved the “old bargain”: in 1832, George W. Pierce married Anne Longfellow, a sister of Henry W. Longfellow (Franklin Pierce heard of the union only belatedly). Tragically, too, George W. Pierce met an early death in 1835.¹¹

Charismatic, handsome, and from a family with the right name, Franklin Pierce rose through politics at a meteoric rate. He was elected to the New Hampshire Legislature, and then, in an unexpected turn of events, the twenty-five-year-old was chosen that body’s speaker. Benjamin B. French vividly recalled meeting Pierce on horseback in 1831. Before long, the two men had taken rooms together in Concord and “commenced a friendship between us that has been, on my part, almost an affection,” as French later recalled. In 1833, Pierce was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives as a Democrat. He made his initial quarters mostly with other New England Democrats, including Francis O.J. Smith of Maine, Senator Isaac Hill of New Hampshire, and Benjamin French (newly installed in a clerk’s position) and his wife.¹²

At this same time, Franklin Pierce began his courtship of Jane Means Appleton, the daughter of the wealthy Appleton family of Amherst, Massachusetts. The circumstances of their

¹¹ Franklin Pierce to David Davis, Dec. 31, 1828, unaccessioned manuscript acquired in 2013, NHHS. For the correspondence of Franklin Pierce and George Washington Pierce, see the twenty letters available at MEHS; for the quote, see Franklin Pierce to George W. Pierce, Oct. 25, 1834. On the wager between Hawthorne and Cilley, see Richard B. Harwell, *Hawthorne and Longfellow; a Guide to an Exhibit* (Brunswick, Me.: Bowdoin College Library, 1969), esp. 61-65.

¹² Benjamin B. French, *Witness to the Young Republic: A Yankee’s Journal, 1828-1870*, ed. Donald B. Cole and John J. McDonough (Hanover, N.H.: Univ. Press of New England, 1989), 239; Goldman, *Congressional Directories*, 267.

initial meeting and courtship remain obscure, but the couple shared an essential Bowdoin connection: Jane's father was Jesse Appleton, president of the college until his death in 1819, and her brother-in-law, Alpheus S. Packard, had taught Pierce mathematics there. Nevertheless, the Appleton family, located in urbane Amherst, considered itself to be of a higher social standing than the Pierce family, whose rural New Hampshire origins smacked of uncouthness. Jane's mother and sisters may have discouraged the match, but there would be no stopping it. Franklin Pierce married Jane Means Appleton on November 19, 1834, at the bride's family home in Amherst. From the groom's side, only father Benjamin Pierce attended.¹³

Given the many later tragedies that afflicted the Pierces, historians have often thought of the marriage between Franklin Pierce and Jane Means Appleton to have always been an unhappy one. By the time of the Pierces' wedding in 1834, however, changing ideas about marriage promoted a "new desire for intimacy and companionship"—located by one historian in the example of contemporaries William and Elizabeth Wirt—that had come to displace the "separate spheres" and domestic patriarchy of the preceding generation. By all accounts, Franklin Pierce and Jane Means Appleton truly loved one another. When the newlyweds departed for Baltimore, and then on to Washington, they were accordingly fresh with the excitement brought by their nuptials and buoyed by the anticipation of the social season ahead. "Franklin is well, in fine

¹³ For an excellent short account of Jane Means Appleton Pierce's life, see Jane Walter Venzke and Craig Paul Venzke, "The President's Wife, Jane Means Appleton Pierce: A Woman of Her Time," *Historical New Hampshire* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 45-63; and Michael Minor and Larry F. Vrzalik, "A Study in Tragedy: Jane Means Pierce First Lady (1853-1857)," *Manuscripts* 40, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 177-189. On the Means Appleton family reaction to Franklin Pierce, see Mary Jane Means to Abigail Atherton (Spalding) Davis, [ca. Nov. 1834], in Anne M. Means, *Amherst and Our Family Tree* (Boston: privately printed, 1921), 239-40. A recent biography is also helpful, see Ann Covell, *Jane Means Appleton Pierce: U.S. First Lady (1853-1857): Her Family, Life, and Times* (Lanham, Md.: Hamilton Books, 2013); as is an older but still excellent article, Lloyd C. Taylor, Jr., "A Wife for Mr. Pierce," *New England Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (Sept. 1955): 339-48. On wedding rituals in antebellum America, see Patrick W. O'Neil, "Tying the Knots: The Nationalization of Wedding Rituals in Antebellum America" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chapel Hill, 2009).

spirits, and apparently as happy as a man should be during the first month of the honey moon,” James B. Thornton wrote to Benjamin Pierce. “His lady I believe is in much better health than when she came on.” Whether the new Mr. and Mrs. Pierce would continue to enjoy such blessings in the years ahead remained to be seen, but at that moment, the world must have seemed wide open with possibilities.¹⁴

A Grave Season

In 1820, Americans newspapers proudly proclaimed that the nation had entered an “Era of Good Feelings.” The moniker, pleasing though it might be, concealed entrenched divisions not only in politics, but also in society as a whole. The conservative principles of the Federalists had largely been absorbed into the Democratic-Republican Party, so that the august patriot President James Monroe could rightly be said to represent all factions. Yet a mere four years later the nation would witness one of the greatest electoral convulsions in its history, perhaps even more shattering than the contest between Jefferson and Adams twenty-four years before. From this “favorite son” election would emerge Andrew Jackson as the country’s next great leader. Soon enough, the Democratic Party, or the Democracy as it was commonly called, found political success. An opposition party under the name of Whigs—an allusion to the party that opposed the Stuart monarchy in seventeenth-century England—rose to challenge the Jacksonians. The stage was set for the second era of the two-party system.

¹⁴ On the Wirts, see Anya Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic: Elizabeth and William Wirt and the Companionate Ideal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1998), here 2; the historiographic debate over “separate spheres” receives concise treatment in Janet L. Coryell, “Superseding Gender: The Role of the Woman Politico in Antebellum Partisan Politics,” in *Women and the Unstable State in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Alison M. Parker and Sarah B. Gordon (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2000): 84-112, here 104-106. James B. Thornton to Benjamin Pierce, Dec. [18, 1834], Franklin Pierce letters and documents (MssColl 17911), NYPL.

As late as the 1830s, New Hampshire politics resembled something of the two-party system of Federalists versus Democratic-Republicans. In his early political encounters, Franklin Pierce operated along political dualities that had long since passed elsewhere in the country. He routinely referred to political enemies in his home state as “federalists,” while on the more national scene, he seamlessly transformed them into Whigs. Whether they were called Federalists or Whigs, the bitter partisan division of Jacksonian Washington engendered some of the deepest political and personal rancor. Affairs of honor, which had been frequent occurrences in the Early Republic, returned with newfound fervor. From this charged climate came perhaps the most famous duel in U.S. congressional history: the Cilley-Graves affair. The duel would have a direct impact on the future course of the young congressman Franklin Pierce.¹⁵

Barely half an hour after their wedding, Franklin and Jane Pierce had departed Amherst on the road to Washington. At first, the new Mrs. Pierce might have anticipated some enjoyment from the numerous opportunities offered by Washington society. Writing to her new father-in-law, Jane Pierce expressed a telling equivocation about life in Washington: “I find Washington very much as I expected both in appearance and climate... We have an invitation to dinner at Gov. Cass’ on Wednesday which is accepted notwithstanding my predilections for a quiet dinner at home.” The most appealing aspect of their Washington residence turned out to be the lodging found at a boardinghouse with other northern Democrats. Of this experience Jane Pierce wrote to Benjamin Pierce: “The gentleman and ladies of our family are quite social and pleasant and

¹⁵ For Pierce’s use of “federalist,” see, for example, Franklin Pierce to Simon P. Colby, Dec. 12, 1837, Gilder Lehrman Collection, N-YHS; and continuing into the 1840s, Pierce to J.J. Carroll, Jan. 21, 1841 (transcript), Franklin Pierce Papers, box 2, folder 1, NHHS. On politics in New Hampshire during this period, see Donald B. Cole, *Jacksonian Democracy in New Hampshire, 1800-1851* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970).

we are on a very easy footing as we should be to live so long together.” She called the fellow members of the boardinghouse her “family.”¹⁶

The Pierces soon found themselves overwhelmed with an abundance of calls, levees, and parties. A carriage accident in January 1835 did not preclude attending to social calls on the very same evening, as Jane wrote to her mother: “[we were] well enough that evening to *right ourselves* and stay till 10 o’clock at Mr. Hills where we met about 20 or 30 people consisting of our family and a few other acquaintances.” Over time the toll became greater, notably with the omnipresent custom of social calls: “It seems to me a very idle and useless ceremony (this ‘carding’ as it is called) and I am half inclined not to observe it at all.” The couple became increasingly isolated from the same society that had once tempted them. In January 1836, Franklin Pierce wrote to his brother-in-law General John McNeil that he and Jane only rarely accepted invitations and “did not lead any social existence” in Washington. The Pierces’ Washington boardinghouse was, perhaps predictably, a pro-temperance establishment. Messmate John Fairfield boasted to his wife back in Maine: “[W]e have no wine. There is not a wine drinker among us, - even Frank Peirce [*sic*] has left off.” In sum, as Pierce wrote to his old friend George W. Pierce, he found life with his new wife to be far superior to living in a “*bachelors hall* – for which mode of living I have lost all taste.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Goldman, *Congressional Directories*, 277, 291, 306; Jane Means Appleton Pierce to Benjamin Pierce, Dec. 13, 1834, Franklin Pierce Papers, box 1, folder 8, NHHS.

¹⁷ Jane Means Appleton Pierce to Elizabeth Appleton, Feb. 1, 1835; and Franklin Pierce to John McNeil, Jan. 25, 1836, Franklin Pierce Papers, box 1, folder 10, NHHS. Jane Pierce to Robert Appleton, Dec. 11, 1836, *Pierce-Aiken Papers Supplement*, ed. Boas, 27-28; Franklin Pierce to George W. Pierce, Oct. 2, 1835, George W. Pierce Papers, MEHS. John Fairfield of Maine was a strong political supporter of Pierce. Most of his letters have been transcribed in Arthur G. Staples, ed., *The Letters of John Fairfield* (Lewiston, Me.: Lewiston Journal Co., 1922); however, some letters were excluded, including the one cited above; see John Fairfield to Anne T. Fairfield, Jan. 3, 1837, *The Papers of John Fairfield, 1835-1847* (microfilm, 3 reels, Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1922), reel 1.

Even without participating in the social opportunities of the capital, Pierce made other friends with the leading men of the Democratic Party, especially with those former Bowdoin College classmates and members of his boardinghouse “family.” From all accounts, Pierce and his classmate and messmate Jonathan Cilley enjoyed an especially close friendship. In October 1837, the Pierces even traveled to Thomaston, Maine, to visit with Jonathan Cilley and his wife Deborah. Their shared mess included Senator Ruel Williams of Maine, Senator Garrett Wall of New Jersey, and Timothy Carter of Maine. To start 1838, Franklin Pierce was balancing the abstinence of social life in Washington with the warm camaraderie of male friendship offered by Cilley, Wall (who will be recalled to have been an intimate friend of James Buchanan), and the others. He might even have expected a modicum of happiness in the arrangement.¹⁸

Events would prove just how wrong that expectation would be. Jonathan Cilley soon found himself embroiled in an affair of honor with deadly ramifications. The dispute centered on comments made by James Watson Webb, the editor of the *New York Courier and Enquirer*, who supported the Bank of the United States. The trouble began when Henry Wise of Virginia attempted to frame Webb’s support of the bank in terms of honor; Cilley refused to accept such a framing. Then, Webb himself challenged Cilley through his second, William Graves of Kentucky. Cilley refused the note; in turn, Graves felt compelled under the code of honor to challenge Cilley to a duel, which the latter readily accepted. Franklin Pierce could not convince Cilley to avoid the encounter, as his correspondence and later congressional testimony attested. Cilley and Graves met on the infamous dueling grounds just outside of the city in Maryland.

¹⁸ Jonathan Cilley to Deborah Cilley, Oct. 12, 1837, in *A Breach of Privilege: Cilley Family Letters, 1820-1867*, ed. Eve Anderson (Spruce Head, Me.: Seven Coin Press, 2002), 126; Franklin Pierce to George W. Pierce, Oct. 2, 1835, George W. Pierce Papers, MEHS. Like members of the same family, Franklin Pierce and Jonathan Cilley were not without their disagreements: in 1835, Pierce tried to repair the damage from a falling out between his former law partner, George W. Pierce, and Cilley.

When two rounds of rifle fire failed to produce a conclusive outcome, a final round was exchanged that left Cilley mortally wounded.¹⁹

All Washington was astir with news of the fatal duel. Henry French, Franklin Pierce's former messmate in New Hampshire, reported to his brother Benjamin that Cilley's death had "created a great sensation here." The popular press in the North, meanwhile, excoriated the affair. One broadside, titled "The Duellists; or the Death of Cilley," waxed poetic in rhyming couplets, emphasizing how "Eight legislators" had "Rode forth to Bladensburgh to fight / Upon a winter's day." The New Hampshire Democracy attempted to control the damage of rumors that Pierce had been personally involved in the affair. "I have seen it stated in a Pennsylvania Paper," Charles Atherton wrote to fellow New Hampshire Democrat John P. Hale, "that 'it was understood Mr. Pierce of N.H. was a second to Mr. Cilley' ... The story is false in every respect. Mr. Pierce was not a second of Mr. Cilley, & was not on the field." By mid-March, Pierce felt compelled to address "the flagrant injustice which was done to myself & others" in the Boston *Atlas* about "the most tragical affair."²⁰

On March 17, Pierce prepared a long letter to Hezekiah Prince, Jr., the brother of the widowed Deborah Cilley. He reported how the news of Cilley's death had "made me quite sick for two or three days following." In the meanwhile, another messmate, Timothy J. Carter of

¹⁹ Several accounts of the duel are useful; see esp., *Funeral Oration Delivered at the Capital in Washington Over the Body of Hon. Jonathan Cilley, With a Full Account of the Late Duel, Comprising Many Facts Never Before Published* (Boston: privately printed, 1838); *Memoirs and Services of Three Generations* (Rockland, Me, 1909); Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1987), 48; Jeffrey L. Pasley, "Minnows, Spies, and Aristocrats: The Social Crisis of Congress in the Age of Martin Van Buren," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 559-653, esp. 641-50. The fallout from the duel continued in the years ahead, including in the campaign rhetoric surrounding the election of 1840; see Clara B. Washburn, "Some Aspects of the 1844 Presidential Campaign in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 3 (1945): 58-74, esp. 72-73.

²⁰ Henry F. French to Benjamin B. French, Mar. 4, 1838, Benjamin B. French and Henry F. French Papers, box 1, folder 11, NHHS; "The Duellists; or the Death of Cilley," (SY1838 no. 22), N-YHS; Charles G. Atherton to John P. Hale, Mar. 3, 1838, John Parker Hale Papers [1994 – 068 (M)], NHHS; Franklin Pierce to Isaac Hill, Mar. 15, 1838, Gilder Lehrman Collection, N-YHS.

Maine, had died unexpectedly on March 14 of “a most distressing sickness.” With “all this sorrow and anxiety,” Pierce reported, “I have hardly had the heart or ability to do anything.” The loss was deeply personal to Pierce: “I loved him with a brother’s love and I mourn for him as no man but a brother can mourn. Our acquaintance commenced about eighteen years ago and was never interrupted for a moment.” In an act of honorable remembrance, Pierce retained the “broken arms” from the duel, but his mess arrangement with his former Bowdoin classmate had been permanently destroyed.²¹

In June, Deborah Cilley wrote with news of her husband’s sermon to Jane Pierce, adding well wishes for the Pierces’ good health. Then, Deborah Cilley added an extensive postscript addressed to Franklin. “I apply to you Mr. Pierce, with perfect confidence that you will feel happy in doing any thing for those who were dear to your lost friend,” she wrote. The widow Cilley requested that Pierce send the published record from the most recent session of the House. She feared that her nine-year-old son Greenleaf “will soon be able to understand” the meaning of her father’s death, and she hoped to obtain a fuller account of her husband’s demise. Pierce dutifully complied. Six years later, Deborah Cilley had succumbed to illness, leaving two behind two orphaned children. In time, these two boys would initiate their own friendships with Franklin Pierce.²²

Another of Cilley’s Bowdoin classmates, Nathaniel Hawthorne, was also struck by his friend’s death. Hawthorne had visited Cilley in the summer of 1837, where the two “met like old

²¹ Franklin Pierce to Hezekiah Prince, Jr., Mar. 17, 1838, in *A Breach of Privilege*, Anderson, 174-176. See also Elizabeth Appleton to Mary Mason, Mar. 21, 1838, *Pierce-Aiken Papers*, ed. Boas, 16: “We have both had our feelings strongly excited – by the situation in which Mr. Piece has been placed in consequence of the fatal duel – and all the circumstances connected with it – and dear Jane has not for a moment been absent from my thoughts. The atmosphere in Washington – is so contaminated that danger seems lurking all around them...their *Boarding House* was a house of mourning – Mr. Carter lay dead in a room adjoining and his afflicted wife and brother – had the deep sympathy of all its inmates.”

²² Deborah P. Cilley to Jane Means Appleton Pierce, June 13, 1838, Franklin Pierce Papers [M 1976 – 002], box 1, folder 14, NHHS.

friends.” At the request of John L. O’Sullivan, editor of the *Democratic Review*, Hawthorne prepared an obituary of Cilley. The author dutifully wrote to former classmates, such as Henry W. Longfellow, for remembrances about the man. Hawthorne completed the work on April 19. “It was impossible not to regard him with the kindest feelings,” Hawthorne wrote in the memorial, recalling how “he had been to me almost as an elder brother.”²³

Death was a common part of life in the Nineteenth Century. One historian has argued further, that many in this period felt society was “suffering from constant intrusions of sickness, misfortune, and premature death.” For his own part, Franklin Pierce had already experienced the death of several of his college classmates, his younger brother, and his father. Nevertheless, the death of an intimate male friend never became any easier. After the death of Jonathan Cilley, Pierce became notably more disillusioned with Washington life. “I am full of grief...my mind dwells upon the subject and I know not when to stop,” he confided to John P. Hale. Members of Pierce’s extended family worried about the effect on him of losing so close a friend as Cilley, including Frances Appleton Packard who noted to her sister Mary Appleton Aiken that Jane “seems to feel the utmost respect & attachment to Mr. Cilley with whom Mr. Pierce had been a good deal intimate.” The loss of an intimate friendship could not easily be overcome, as the Appleton sisters well knew.²⁴

²³ Nathaniel Hawthorne to John L. O’Sullivan, April 19, 1838, *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 15:272-73; Hawthorne, “Jonathan Cilley,” *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 110-119, 583-87; and on the wager with Cilley, see Richard B. Harwell, *Hawthorne and Longfellow; a Guide to an Exhibit* (Brunswick, Me.: Bowdoin College Library, 1969), esp. 61-65. In 1849, Hawthorne declared that his memorial to Cilley “might as well have been written by a Whig as by a Democrat” (Hawthorne to George S. Hillard, June 12, 1849, *op cit*, 16:277-78).

²⁴ Nicholas Marshall, “‘In the Midst of Life we are in Death’: Affliction and Religion in Antebellum New York,” in *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America*, ed. Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2003): 176-186, here 177. Franklin Pierce to John P. Hale, Mar. 2, 1838, Hale-Chandler Papers, RDC; Frances E. Packard to Mary M. Aiken, Mar. 6, 1838, Appleton-Aiken Papers, box 2, UMC.

In the following term, Franklin Pierce found a new boardinghouse, uniting with Garrett Wall and Ruell Williams once more. The capital city continued to present few social occasions for the Pierces. In a letter to her mother, Jane Pierce wrote how “our ladies and gentlemen went to a great dinner at the President’s,” but, “I did not go, partly because I had a cold and partly because I did not want to and took a quiet walk on the avenue with Mr. Pierce.” With the birth of their second son Benjamin in 1839, Jane decided to remain with her sister Mary Appleton Aiken in Andover, Massachusetts. Aiken supported the move in a letter to her mother: “I wish [Franklin Pierce] well out of the region of those bursts of political feeling - & *forever* out of it – not only for dear Jenny’s sake, but for his own – for I should deprecate the influence of such an atmosphere for any friend I have.”²⁵

With his wife staying in New England, Franklin Pierce resorted to a private residence away from the Capitol for the remainder of his time in Washington. He wrote regular letters to colleagues back home, often from the floor of the Senate, where he derided the antics of his fellow senators. With the recharter bill for the Second Bank of the United States dominating business in the summer of 1841, Pierce could not stand the “humbugs and absurdities.” About one compromise measure under consideration, he thought that Senators “Preston and Merrick made *asses* of themselves and voted for it.” The new president was also unsafe from his venom: “Tyler will write [himself] an ass- and better take his few friends into a *cab* and recross the Potomac as soon as practicable,” he wrote in August (eventually, Pierce would embrace Tyler after his veto of the Bank recharter bill). With few comforts and with Jane and his son distant to

²⁵ Goldman, *Congressional Directories*, 344; Jane Pierce to Elisa Appleton, Dec. 16, 1838, Appleton-Aiken Papers, box 2, UMC; Mary A. Aiken to Elizabeth Appleton, Feb. 22, 1836, *Pierce-Aiken Papers*, ed. Boas, 23.

him, Washington plainly disgusted Pierce. “If ever man longed to turn his back upon this dirty, dirty miserable City I do now,” he declared to a colleague at home.²⁶

Without Jane to moderate him, Pierce also drifted back toward destructive habits. He began drinking and smoking again, though he would swear off each again by December 1841. Through the drinking nevertheless would continue, including bouts of alcoholic depression, during the remainder of the next decade, for a time, at least, Pierce was fully on the wagon: in a letter to Jane from January 1842, he reported on the growing temperance movement with much satisfaction. By the start of the winter session of 1842, Pierce had suffered enough. He submitted his resignation from the Senate in February, profoundly happy at the prospect of never again returning to Washington.²⁷

Franklin Pierce’s resignation from the Senate was part of a broader trend in the preceding decades of “lonely congressmen” making the difficult decision to return to their families at home. “Without the emotional moorings of home,” a historian of the early Congress has found, “members often experienced their time in Congress as a kind of exile.” Franklin Pierce clearly felt such an exile. His commitment to a companionate marriage, plainly evident through his letters to his wife at home, must be considered as a primary reason for his resignation. In his letters to his wife, moreover, Pierce demonstrated the peculiar drive of so many congressmen from this period, a desire as another historian of this period has identified, to be “both powerful and vulnerable at once.” The example of Franklin Pierce’s congressional service adds a hitherto understudied factor to these studies of the power of family and loneliness in the nation’s capital, namely, how the frequent interlude of death, particularly among intimate messmates, contributed

²⁶ Goldman, *Congressional Directories*, 359, 374; Franklin Pierce to H.H. Carroll, July 27, 1841, and [n.d., ca. Aug. 1841], Gilder Lehrman Collection, N-YHS.

²⁷ Franklin Pierce to Elisabeth A. McNeil, Dec. 22, 1841, Jan. 7, 1842; Pierce to Jane Means Appleton Pierce, Jan. 29, 1842; all in Franklin Pierce Papers, box 2, folders 4-5, NHHS.

to the decision to terminate a public man's service to his country. For one as plainly ambitious as Franklin Pierce, the news of his resignation must have struck his friends back home as an unexpected development. But when considered in the context of Jonathan Cilley's untimely death, the bitter partisanship of the time, and the not entirely unusual decision to resign for personal reasons, Pierce's choice to return to New Hampshire was not without precedent, either.²⁸

Pierce's resignation from the Senate did not lead to the long awaited happiness at home. In November 1843, five-year-old Franklin Pierce, the older of the two sons, passed away after an extended bout with bilious fever. Pierce believed that he understood the ultimate cause of the loss, couching it in religious terms in a letter to his younger brother Henry: "We are commanded to set up no idol in our hearts and I am conscious that with the last two years particularly my prevailing feeling has been that we are living for our children... We should have lived for God and have left the dear ones to the care of Him who is alone able to take care of them and us." If upon his resignation from the Senate and return to New Hampshire Franklin Pierce had hoped to live for his family, he now felt as never before the folly of his ways.²⁹

As if the loss of young Franky were not enough, young Benjamin Pierce (age three) also came down with bilious fever. A recently recovered letter to Mary Appleton Aiken suggests the deep depression Jane Pierce was experiencing during this period. She described the horror of Benny's illness, reporting how her husband had sat up all night with him. Jane lamented how she was no condition to sit up with Benny herself, feeling filled with "dread." Things seemed

²⁸ On the terms of congressional service during this period, see Rosemarie Zagarri, "The Family Factor: Congressmen, Turnover, and the Burden of Public Service in the Early American Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 283-316, here 284; and Padraig Riley, "The Lonely Congressmen: Gender and Politics in Early Washington, D.C.," *Journal of the Early Republic* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 243-73, 273.

²⁹ Franklin Pierce to Henry D. Pierce, Nov. 19, 1843, Franklin Pierce Papers, box 2, folder 7, NHHS.

“very very dark.” Her husband’s obligations also worried her. Although Franklin had promised to remain at home, Jane feared that he would be called away by inevitable legal engagements. Not for the last time would death strike the Pierce household.³⁰

During Franky’s fatal illness and Benny’s subsequent bout, Franklin Pierce showed the endless compassion that characterized his commitment to his personal relations. Having now lost two children (and nearly a third), he turned his attentions to his law practice, working harder and traveling farther than previously. “We now feel and must long continue to feel his loss, his absence at every turn & we must weep,” he wrote to a friend. For her part, Jane Pierce turned her attention to her sole surviving son, Benny. Some have suggested that she now lived completely for this son (an affectionate daguerreotype captures the pair’s bond). Without family to live for, where might Franklin Pierce next turn? The unexpected answer would ultimately come thousands of miles to the South. First, however, Pierce faced one more loss of political friendship.³¹

Hale Friendship No Longer

When James K. Polk was inaugurated as the nation’s eleventh president, he laid out four clear goals for his administration: namely to reinvigorate the Independent Treasury System that had fallen out of favor under President Tyler, to reduce the tariff on manufactured goods, to acquire Oregon from Great Britain by any means necessary, and to seize all of California from Mexico. Ambitious, devious, and undaunted, Polk would eventually accomplish all these aims. For his cabinet he attempted to assemble a team of colleagues suitable to execute his vision, including asking Franklin Pierce to assume the attorney-generalship (he declined in order to be

³⁰ Jane Means Appleton Pierce to Mary Aiken, Dec. 10, 1843, Franklin Pierce Papers [M 2008 – 015], box 2, folder 7, NHHS.

³¹ Franklin Pierce to William C. Clark, Nov. 30, 1843, Gilder Lehrman Collection, N-YHS.

with his family). By that time, Pierce was once again engaged full force in his legal practice around the state of New Hampshire. Although now separated from national politics, he continued to involve himself on the state level as the chairman of the state central committee.

Thus it was during the divisive years of the Polk administration that the tragedies of his personal life were multiplied by the gradual loss of many of his closest political friends in New Hampshire, most notably, John Parker Hale. In 1833, the two men had reignited something of their college friendship during their service together in the New Hampshire legislature. Hale's political views at this early stage were, according to his biographer, decisively influenced by his friendship with Pierce, and although Pierce could count many men among his political associates, he freely admitted that none was greater than Hale. Once elected to the House of Representatives, Pierce secured a federal district attorneyship for Hale. As late as 1835, both men seemingly viewed abolitionism as a great evil to society. In one letter from 1836, at Hale's request he commented upon several New Hampshire colleagues in the strictest confidence: "This is counting very strongly upon the interest you feel in my fortunes and I have said what I shall say to no other man and what I should not say to you, but for your own request made in the true spirit of generosity & friendship." The intimacy of male friendship, born in college, had enabled a unique bond of political trust.³²

When the Whig ascendancy in 1841 forced Hale out of office, Senator Pierce next successfully lobbied for his election to the United States House of Representatives. From his initial foray into the U.S. Congress, Hale developed an opposition to the pro-slavery politics of the Democracy. He worked to lift the so-called "Gag Rule" in the House, and later, he vowed to vote against the annexation of Texas. Finally, in 1844, Hale proposed legislation that would divide the new territory into separate free and slave components (it was defeated). The stage was

³² Franklin Pierce to John P. Hale, Mar. 22, 1836, Hale-Chandler Papers, box 3, RDC.

set for a public break from the Democratic Party that had so long sustained him. On January 11, 1845, Hale released a public letter that would prove to be his unmaking as a New Hampshire Democrat. Appealing directly to his constituents, Hale laid out the case against the annexation of Texas. Primarily, he opposed the addition on anti-slavery grounds: the South wanted Texas “as the sure and effectual means of sustaining slavery,” he wrote.³³

Franklin Pierce was apoplectic. At once, he consulted with his Democratic colleagues in the state about the appropriate course of action. Henry French reported to his brother about a visit from Pierce: “We talked two hours or so, and Mr. Pierce went away much more calm than he came,” though he afterwards drove “his horse a dozen miles further in a blustering day.” Whether calmer or not, Pierce could not shake the feeling of utter betrayal. “I have always been a personal friend of Mr. Hale,” he wrote to Edmund Burke, “but in a case like this I know no personal friendships.” The real emotional pain associated with the loss suggests just how much Pierce had valued Hale’s friendship.³⁴

Hale likewise valued his friendship with Pierce and did not wish to see it ended over a political question, if possible. “I want to write one word to you as a friend, not a solitary one as a Politician,” Hale began a fateful, final letter to Pierce. He explained that his actions had rested on “honest convictions” and that he hoped that his friend would understand this. Pierce smoldered over how to reply, writing at least two drafts of the letter, which reveal a conflicted and agitated state of mind. Writing with the “deepest feeling,” Pierce answered: “Laying aside the political bearing of the circular, [the New Hampshire Democratic Party] looked upon it as

³³ Richard H. Sewell, *John P. Hale and the Politics of Abolition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 23; Wallner, “Franklin Pierce and Bowdoin College Associates Hawthorne and Hale,” 26-29; *Letter from John P. Hale, of New Hampshire, to His Constituents, on the Proposed Annexation of Texas* (Washington, D.C., 1845).

³⁴ Henry F. French to Benjamin B. French, Jan. 19, 1845, Benjamin B. French and Henry F. French Papers, box 2, folder 37, NHHS; Franklin Pierce to Edmund Burke, Jan. 16, 1845, Edmund Burke Papers, 1821-1888, LC.

cruel & unjust toward a large circle of as true friends as ever watched with solicitude the fortunes of a public man.” For Pierce, Hale’s actions were doubly hurtful, coming as they did from so close a personal friend. “Nothing has occurred in the politicks of this State to give me so much pain as your movement and the action which it has rendered indispensable for the vindication of the party and indeed for its preservation,” Pierce wrote (in an earlier draft, he first thought to call the “movement” a “breach”). From this point forward, the two men never again associated together on a personal level.³⁵

In fact, Franklin Pierce and John Parker Hale were at the beginning of a political rivalry whose enmity would epitomize the maelstrom of the 1840s and 1850s. Their respective friends arranged a public debate over the question of Texas annexation. On June 5, 1845, some two thousand people gathered to witness the proceedings. The rhetorical barbs exchanged at their collegiate society’s debates twenty years earlier had been transformed into a bitter rancor between representatives of two irreconcilable positions. For a closing argument, Hale reportedly said that he hoped his tombstone would read: “He who lies beneath surrendered office, place, and power, rather than bow down and worship slavery.” A reporter for the *New Hampshire Statesman* observed that Pierce’s speech was “more to Mr. Hale than upon the great subject of Annexation.”³⁶

The following year, a coalition of Independent Democrats and Whigs nominated Hale as its candidate for the upcoming U.S. Senate election in March 1846. The union abhorred Pierce, and he vowed to fight back. In a letter to Horatio Bridge, Pierce connected Hale’s treachery with

³⁵ John P. Hale to Franklin Pierce, Jan. 18, 1845, Franklin Pierce Papers, NHHS; Pierce to Hale, Jan. 24, 1845, Hale-Chandler Papers, RDC; two additional drafts are housed in the Franklin Pierce Papers, NHHS and LC. In addition to Nichols, *Franklin Pierce*, 135-138, see also Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil: The Election of 1848*, (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1970), 57-59.

³⁶ Abial Rolfe, *Reminiscences of Concord, or Personal Recollections of Seventy Years* (Concord, N.H.: Rumford Press, 1901), 28; *New Hampshire Statesman*, June 13, 1845.

the Federalist conspiracies of old. “Many honest men have had their eyes opened by the shameless trade between Hale & the Federalists, and will in March return...with their old friends,” he predicted. But Hale’s coalition proved too formidable for the New Hampshire Democracy. In the years ahead, Hale would become a leader in the new Free Soil Party, and in 1852, the two men would nominally run against one another for the presidency (Pierce as a Democrat and Hale as a Free Soil candidate).³⁷

Their heated rivalry continued unabated through Pierce’s presidency. In the aftermath of the Kansas-Nebraska act, the Republican Party in New Hampshire, to which Hale now declared allegiance, achieved widespread electoral success and returned him to the Senate. From the outset, Senator Hale attacked President Pierce in the most vehement of terms. Personal relations had become so strained that Pierce reportedly turned his back on Hale at the president’s New Year levee, traditionally a time when politics was put aside. After Pierce’s failure to gain the presidential nomination in 1856, Hale wrote to his wife Lucy: “Upon the coolest reflection which I can bestow upon the subject, it appears to me that no man in modern times has inflicted such serious and lasting injury upon his country as Franklin Pierce.” The once warm friends now stood as the bitterest of enemies. Perhaps only those who had once shared so intimate a friendship as Pierce and Hale could have hated each other so ardently and for so long.³⁸

How could it be that two men from so similar backgrounds become the bitterest of enemies? The answer has to do implicitly with the highly gendered nature of antebellum political culture. On one level, of course, the political differences between Franklin Pierce and John P. Hale were borne out over disagreements about the future of slavery in the western

³⁷ Franklin Pierce to Horatio Bridge, Feb. 20, 1846, Franklin Pierce Collection, box 1, folder 5, BCL.

³⁸ Benjamin P. Poore, *Perley’s Reminiscences of Sixty Years in the National Metropolis*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1886), 1:458-59; John P. Hale to Lucy Hale, July 3, 1856, John Parker Hale Papers, box 2, folder 5, NHHS.

territories. Perhaps Hale always harbored an anti-slavery position, but he had subordinated his moral qualms out of respect for his political chieftain. As Hale's political actions moved increasingly out of step with the Democracy, Pierce protected his friend as best he could. Once Hale stepped outside of proper party channels, Pierce could no longer abide his actions.

On a personal level, however, the feeling of betrayal was magnified by the personal loyalties the two friends and messmates had felt for one another. That the two men were reluctant to abandon their friendship suggests the interconnections between the two concepts of politics and friendship, in a manner not altogether different from the prevalent idea of society as divided into public and private spheres. In the terms of intimate male friendships, two men of competing political views could still be friendly on a personal level. The dissolution of these two spheres meant an irreconcilable and permanent division between Franklin Pierce and John P. Hale. The split anticipated the more serious physical altercations to come in the years ahead, most notably the caning of the Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner by South Carolina representative Preston Brooks. Ultimately, the Pierce-Hale split was emblematic of the serious problems presented to personal friendships shared by men of opposing political views.³⁹

A Granite Son in Mexico

When John L. O'Sullivan declared in 1845 that the United States possessed a "manifest destiny" to expand across the continent, few Americans doubted the providence of his words.

The nation had already more than quadrupled in area from its original borders in 1776. The

³⁹ The ideology of "separate spheres" has been applied to the gendered divisions that excluded women from formal participation in politics, a separation which has been roundly questioned in the historiography of the nineteenth-century household; see, for example, Linda Kerber et al, "Beyond Roles, Beyond Spheres: Thinking About Gender in the Early Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (July 1989): 565-85. For a useful introduction to the chronology of women's many roles in politics prior to the Civil War, see Rosemary Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), esp. 1-10.

migration of settlers from the eastern states to territories farther west had likewise produced a dozen new states by the 1840s. The annexation of Texas, though controversial in New England, enjoyed widespread support in the South and the West. If President Polk wanted the lands of Mexican California, few doubted that he would have them. When war erupted with Mexico, critics worried about the results of each outcome. “The United States will conquer Mexico,” Ralph Waldo Emerson warned, “but it will be as the man swallows the arsenic, which brings him down in turn.”⁴⁰

Against this backdrop of American expansionism, Franklin Pierce at long last seized his moment for military service. Forty-two years old and without any formal training, Pierce enlisted in the army at the rank of private. The dictums of honor have often been put forward to explain the seemingly irrational actions of Southerners, but what of Northerners who fought in the war? As one historian of wartime honor has found: “Honor, simply put, is when a man’s self-worth is based on public reputation and the respect of others.” In Pierce’s case, a scholar of the Pierce family has suggested, a combination of a “sterile political life” and a “wish to again be in the mainstream of events” propelled him to action. Certainly a sense of patriotism and desire to further the family’s honor sent Pierce into the battlefield, but perhaps, too, Pierce joined the army for the opportunities of male camaraderie that he no longer enjoyed in his political life. Indeed, the men with whom he served during the war would prove to be some of his closest political allies and personal friends in the decade ahead.⁴¹

At home, Pierce’s decision to enlist in the army attracted fierce criticism from members of his extended family. Jane’s brother-in-law Alpheus Packard lamented the “sad war” and

⁴⁰ For a needed update of the causes of the war with Mexico, see Greenberg, *A Wicked War*. The quote from Emerson may be found in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson: With Annotations*, 10 vols., ed. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909-1914), 7:208.

⁴¹ Foote, *Gentleman and the Roughs*, 6; Boas, ed., *Pierce-Aiken Paper*, 57.

hoped that a “kind Providence” would “watch over [Pierce] & deal gently by him & Jane.” Mary Aiken was more critical of her brother-in-law’s motivations: “I think I am more & more convinced that Pierce went on a sense of duty – tho’ a *mistaken* one.” Nancy Lawrence was blunter still in her denunciation of Pierce: “I did not believe the man could be induced to do so *foolish* a thing as to accept the appointment – he has no *right* to leave his family under such circumstances.” For her part, Jane Pierce felt conflicted about her husband’s decision. She had been complaining to her brother for some time about her husband’s frequent “unpleasant and inconvenient” absences from home on legal business. Now, she faced an even more prolonged removal: “It is truly such a state of absence and entire separation as almost amounts to widowhood – and the feeling of dependence on myself alone so different from what I have been accustomed to is excessively painful....” Whether Franklin consulted with Jane prior to enlisting is unclear. He certainly did make careful arrangements for his family with the war department before shipping out.⁴²

Soon enough, Pierce began recruiting throughout the state, receiving periodic promotions first to colonel and next to brigadier general. Late political connections formed in this wartime moment. Caleb Cushing, who had been appointed a colonel of infantry in a Massachusetts regiment, wrote to Pierce with the hope of serving under him. William L. Marcy, the Secretary of War, also wrote to Pierce with orders to proceed to Mexico as quickly as possible. Both Cushing and Marcy would later be selected for cabinet positions during Pierce’s administration. Once in Mexico, he would be the commanding officer of three regiments: Truman Ransom led the Ninth Infantry; Milledge L. Bonham commanded the Twelfth Infantry; and George W.

⁴² Franklin Pierce to War Department, [n.d., ca. 1846] (copy); Alpheus S. Packard to Mary A. Aiken, Sept. 16, 1847; all in *Pierce-Aiken Papers*, ed. Boas, 82, 52-53; Mary M. Aiken to John Aiken, Nov. 14, 1847; Nancy Lawrence to Mary M. Means, Mar. 8, 1847; both in Appleton-Aiken Papers, box 3, UMC; Jane Pierce to Alpheus S. Packard, Oct. 2, 1846, Franklin Pierce Collection, box 1, folder 6, BCL; Jane Pierce to Mary A. Aiken, June 6, 1847, *Pierce-Aiken Papers*, ed. Boas, 69.

Morgan headed the Fifteenth Infantry. The three regiments collectively formed the “Pierce Brigade.”⁴³

Prior to his departure for Mexico, the citizens of Concord presented General Pierce with a ceremonial sword and a black horse. The portrait of the brigadier general on horseback and in full uniform cut quite the martial pose. Pierce departed for Vera Cruz on May 13, 1847, onboard the bark *Kepler*, fully revived from what he described as a “magical” voyage. Separated once again from his wife and his lone surviving child, Pierce wrote constant letters back home, revealing a depth of emotion for his absent family. “My heart is full dearest Jeannie, full of love for you and our precious boy,” he admitted in July 1847. By August, he was equally distraught at the separation, but he sustained his decision to serve in the army. “I feel that in coming here I have obliged the dictates of duty,” he admitted. Although Pierce saved few letters, he made sure to keep those that he received while on the front, including those from Jane. New evidence further reinforces the depth of despair the separation wreaked upon Franklin and Jane Pierce. “His life thus far has been truthfully presented in the mouth of danger and death – but he was seriously injured by the fall of his horse and has suffered seriously in consequence,” Jane wrote to her niece Harriet in September 1847.⁴⁴

Indeed, Pierce had suffered a fall from his horse, just one of numerous physical ailments that afflicted him during the war. From the fall, he sprained his knee and suffered a groin injury. Like many men whose stomachs could not adjust to the contaminants in the water, he also complained of vomiting and diarrhea. The pain from his knee injury also produced at least one

⁴³ Caleb Cushing to Franklin Pierce, Feb. 25, 1847, Franklin Pierce Papers, LC.

⁴⁴ R. H. Ayers to Franklin Pierce, May 10, 1847, Franklin Pierce Papers, box 2, folder 11, NHHS; Pierce to Jane Pierce, May 21, 1847, Franklin Pierce Papers, LC; Pierce to Jane Means Appleton Pierce, July 12, 1847, Gilder Lehrman Collection, N-YHS; Jane Means Appleton Pierce to Harriet Aiken, [ca. Sept. 1847], Franklin Pierce Papers [M 2010 – 012], box 2, folder 11, NHHS. The ceremonial sword is housed in the collection of the Museum of New Hampshire History.

documented fainting spell. Finally, Pierce was nearly killed when a bullet passed through his hat. Over the course of the war, the Pierce Brigade participated in most nearly every major battle, including those at Contreras, Churubusco, Molina del Rey, and the final siege of Mexico City at Chapultepec. Well aware that his military service would be a matter of public record (and future political import in New Hampshire), Pierce prepared detailed accounts in letters addressed to “My Friends” in Concord, to Jane, and to his brother-in-law John McNeil. In these letters he highlighted his brigade’s successful march from Vera Cruz to Puebla, the bravery of the soldiers in the battle of Contreras, and the subsequent battle of Chapultepec that effectively ended combat. While he did not shy away from his many ailments, neither did he dwell upon them.⁴⁵

After the capture of Mexico City, Pierce was charged with the overall command of the occupying army in the city. On October 13, a group of officers met at the former home of the Mexican minister to the United States for the purpose of forming a social club. They determined to call themselves the Aztec Club, after the civilization that had once ruled all Mexico. Their first elected president was John A. Quitman, who would later become a senator from Mississippi and an ardent secessionist. Through the Aztec Club, Pierce came to know many of the officers serving in the army, including Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Ulysses S. Grant. While George McClellan, another of the club members, wrote that “we will meet none but gentlemen,”

⁴⁵ The best account of Pierce’s wartime service can be found in his diary, a full transcription of which may be found in *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 23:471-497. See also Hawthorne, *Life of Pierce*, which carefully selected those portions of the diary that most favored Pierce. Other accounts of Pierce’s military service include John S.C. Abbott, *Lives of the Presidents of the United States of America, from Washington to the Present Time* (Boston: B.B. Russell & Co., 1867), 332-51; Nichols, *Franklin Pierce*, 147-168; and Wallner, *Franklin Pierce*, 1:131-156. For the wartime letters, see Franklin Pierce to Jane Pierce, Aug 23 and 26, 1847; Pierce to Robert Appleton, Aug. 13, Sept. 23, 1847; in Franklin Pierce Papers, LC; and Pierce to Jane Pierce, Aug. 28, 1847; Pierce to John McNeil, Oct. 17, 1847; and Pierce to “My Friends,” Oct. 22 and 23, 1847; in Franklin Pierce Papers, box 2, folder 11, NHHS. See also Robert Appleton to Mary A. Aiken, Oct. 24, 1847, *Pierce-Aiken Papers*, ed. Boas, 88.

primarily, the club members drank and played cards together. At a farewell dinner given by General Winfield Scott on December 8, Pierce and John B. Magruder nearly came to blows over a poker match. Words were exchanged and Magruder threatened a duel. By the next morning, reasonable sense had once again prevailed and Magruder apologized to Pierce.⁴⁶

With peace negotiations ongoing, political conflict among the generals became inevitable. Given the number of political appointments and the known connection of war service to presidential succession, the stakes were quite high. Open conflict ensued between General Scott and his subordinate generals. At some point, Pierce authored a now missing letter that circulated among the ranking officers, causing a considerable stir in the process. Zachary Taylor wrote to his son-in-law about Pierce's letter, calling it "a very contemptable affair [*sic*], not worth the time or trouble it takes to read it; it is worthy of the author, but unworthy of an ex Senator of the U. States." Lieutenant Ulysses S. Grant may well have disagreed with Taylor. Writing many years later for his memoirs, Grant vividly remembered Pierce: "I was not a supporter of him politically, but I knew him more intimately than I did any other of the volunteer generals." Once home in New Hampshire, Pierce was treated as a hero. As if the first sword were insufficient, the ladies of New Hampshire presented him with a second such blade.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Although Jefferson Davis was among the inaugural members, he was removed from its roster after the war (he was posthumously re-elected to membership in 1921). "Aztec Club of 1847 (Military Society of the Mexican War)," (London, 1928), 561; certificate of membership in the Aztec Club, Oct. 13, 1849. About the Aztec Club, see K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (reprint, New York: Bison Books, 1992, University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 327; about John A. Quitman's role in the war with Mexico, see Eric H. Walther, *The Fire-Eaters* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), esp. 94-98; the letter from George McClellan quoted in Stephen W. Sears, *George McClellan: Young Napoleon* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988), 26. The incident with Magruder is mentioned in John B. Magruder to Franklin Pierce, Aug. 14, 1852; Edward J. Steptoe to James S. Mason, Sept. 23, 1852; and Samuel Woods to Edward L. Hardcastle, Oct. 3, 1852; all in Pierce Papers, box 3, folders 7, 9, & 10, NHHS. With the death of his brothers Benjamin K. Pierce, Franklin now became eligible to receive membership in the Society of Cincinnati; see certificate of membership in the Society of Cincinnati, July 4, 1851, Franklin Pierce Papers [M 1974 – 008], oversize documents, NHHS.

⁴⁷ Zachary Taylor to Robert C. Wood, Oct. 27, 1847, Alfred White Van Sinderen Collection, box 1, folder 27, YUL; Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster &

Pierce stayed in close contact with many of the officers who had served under him, often expressing deep sentiments of friendship. He would likewise remain keenly interested in how the public perceived the military service of those men who had served with him. In response to a letter from Francis Dimond, revealing that his services as collector at Vera Cruz had been questioned by government officials, Pierce vowed: “One thing is quite certain, you can count upon the friendship and aid (so far as they may be able to be of service in such a matter) of all officers of rank, who were so fortunate as to make your acquaintance at that chosen habitation of pestilences.” Likewise, to Albert Tracy of Maine, he wrote in July 1849: “Remembering you as one of my most devoted, energetic and valuable officers, I shall never cease to feel a deep interest in everything connected with your future.”⁴⁸

As Pierce’s example evinces, the war with Mexico produced an “imagined fraternity” based on a shared record of wartime service. The patriotism of such actions was clear to the war’s many American participants. As a scholar of antebellum culture has argued, “national manhood” would seemingly guarantee that “aggressive behavior” would “lead to the health (and wealth), rather than the fragmentation of the nation.” However, theirs was a fraternity riddled with gendered divisions, evident in the varying kinds of manly expressions permitted by those who served. As a historian of Civil War manhood has concluded, “Northern men of all social classes embraced aspects of aggressive manhood before, during, and after the war.” Pierce’s decision to embrace the aggressive and martial manhood pioneered in the war with Mexico would be the galvanizing force that returned him to national affairs. His wartime service instantly transformed him into a candidate for any number of political offices, including, as it

Company, 1885-86): 146-147. This second sword is also part of the collections of the Museum of New Hampshire History.

⁴⁸ Franklin Pierce to Francis M. Dimon, Nov. 15, 1848, Franklin Pierce Papers [2007 – 064], box 2, folder 12, NHHS; Pierce to Albert Tracy, July 23, 1849, Albert Tracy Papers, 1843-1893, box 1, NYPL.

would turn out, the presidency itself. As General Pierce, he was a worthy claimant to the “civic and cultural logic” that helped to produce the “national manhood” of the period.⁴⁹

So proud was Franklin Pierce of his association with his wartime service that he made the remarkable decision to don the uniform once more for a campaign photograph in 1852. The forty-eight-year-old Pierce looks unsteady before the camera’s gaze: his hair tousled and graying at the sides, his left hand tucked inside his shirt in the style of Napoleon (a fact seized upon by his political enemies as evidence of his having fainted on the field of battle), and his eyes fixed as if on some distant object. General Pierce’s military credentials had laid the groundwork for his candidacy for higher office. Now he would once again rely on the help of his friends to execute the impossible dream. Although the photograph showed Pierce to be handsome as ever, the tragic events of the next decade would age him far more than during any period of his life. He would leave the White House looking weathered for the worse, a man defeated politically and personally.

White House Interlude

In the spring of 1852, the Democratic Party met in Baltimore to select a new presidential candidate. Franklin Pierce did not consider himself to be a candidate before the convention, yet he cared deeply about the outcome. Behind the scenes, Edmund Burke of New Hampshire had been quietly working to secure Pierce the necessary votes in the case of a deadlock. When sufficient votes could not be found for party favorite James Buchanan, the delegates quickly turned to a new strategy, that of the dark horse. Suddenly, and in just one ballot, a relative unknown had been nominated for the second time in as many elections cycles. Pierce’s subsequent election to President of the United States at just age forty-eight appeared to be the

⁴⁹ Nelson, *National Manhood*, 15, 25; Foote, *Gentleman and the Roughs*, 178.

crowning pinnacle of his success as a politician. Yet that would not prove to be the case. In both his personal and political worlds, Franklin Pierce was destined to face the greatest hardships of his life.⁵⁰

For Pierce and many other northern Democrats, the primary question before the Democracy was how to preserve the increasingly fragile Union. In a May 17 letter to Folliot T. Lally, his old Mexican War comrade, Pierce expressed his concern about the unbalanced state of affairs between the two sections: “if we of the North who have stood by the constitutional rights of the South are to be abandoned to any terms serving policy, the hopes of democracy and the of the Union must sink together.” The unexpected news of his selection reached Pierce while he was traveling by stagecoach from Boston back to New Hampshire. “It cannot be!” he reportedly exclaimed. But it was, and from that moment forward, Franklin Pierce did not enjoy a moment of privacy for over four years. Letters of congratulations poured into Concord, including several from his former comrades in Mexico. He was now working constantly, answering letters, arranging for campaign materials, and meeting with countless visitors to his home. He was awarded honorary membership in literary societies around the country. In a letter to his sister-in-law Mary Appleton Aiken, Pierce likened the pressures of his candidacy to his military endeavors in Mexico. And here again, Jane proved an essential component of his well-being: “She is showing as she did before my departure for Mexico what deserves to be called true heroism.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ On the efforts of Edmund Burke in the nomination of Franklin Pierce, see Ray, “Some Papers of Franklin Pierce,” *passim*; and Henry H. Metcalf, *Franklin Pierce and Edmund Burke: A President and a President-Maker* (Concord, N.H.: Ranney Printing Co., 1930).

⁵¹ See the letter from Franklin Pierce to Folliot T. Lally, May 17, 1852, located between pages 130 and 131 in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Life of Franklin Pierce* (call no. *KL), Rare Books Division, NYPL. The copy of the book had previously been owned by George Bancroft, who might have subsequently obtained the letter as part of his later research on this period. Franklin Pierce to Mary Aiken, June 27, 1852, Gilder Lehrman Collection, N-YHS.

The presidential campaign reached a fever pitch during the summer months of July and August. Both sides leveled the usual accusations: the Whigs attacked Pierce as unqualified for office; the Democrats questioned Scott's leadership during the Mexican War (the Free Soil Party candidate John P. Hale was mostly ignored by both sides). As such, the combined ticket of Franklin Pierce and William Rufus King generated copious amounts of promotional material. Democratic committees in the various states demanded likenesses of him for campaign material. One such sketch featured a portrait of Pierce superimposed on a block of granite and William Rufus King on a bale of cotton. Others showed Pierce and King surrounded by symbols of democracy: the American flag, the Constitution, and the bald eagle. The victorious party would be the one who best mobilized the masses, and with the sting of the 1848 loss still fresh in their memory, the Democrats furiously outworked their Whig opponents.⁵²

From the outset, the Pierce family bore the nomination with more than a modicum of reserve. Young Benjamin Pierce, barely twelve, wrote poignantly to his mother that he had heard "Father is a candidate for the Presidency. I hope he won't be elected for I should not like to live in Washington and I know you would not either." Then, in January 1853, the unthinkable happened. While riding on a train from Andover to Concord, a sudden derailment caused the car in which the Pierce family was seated to upend. In the resulting crash, Franklin Pierce grabbed onto Jane, but he could not grasp Benjamin's hand. The child slipped, slid along the side of the car, and was decapitated by a train door. Jane Pierce saw the horrific event unfold, including her son's mutilated body, before it could be covered. Struck by a grief that could not be consoled,

⁵² C.L. Ward to Franklin Pierce, June 20, 1852, Benjamin O. Tyler to Pierce, June 12, 1852, and James Buchanan to Pierce, Aug. 2, 1856, Franklin Pierce Papers, boxes 2 and 3, folders 23, 28, and 7, NHHS. On the campaign of 1852, see William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), esp. 13-35; Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), esp. 742-64; Frederick J. Blue, *The Free Soilers: Third Party Politics, 1848-1854* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1973), esp. 253-55.

Jane turned to her pen to write a letter to her dead son. Addressed to “My precious child,” she wrote: “I have passed through the bitter time of leaving our home, and without my child, my own dear Benny.” When news struck of the death of Abigail Fillmore later that March, Jane lamented fatalistically to her sister Mary Aiken: “Fatality seems connected with the occupants of this office and Mansion.”⁵³

By summer, Jane had begun to show signs of recovery. President Pierce called her “better perhaps on the whole than when she came here.” With the departure of the president’s private secretary, Sidney Webster, later that month, the couple was “entirely alone.” Yet, the first family never enjoyed anything resembling happiness while in Washington; Jane Pierce continued to write on mourning stationery long past the appointed period, and she never again strayed from any color but black in her dress. Further family tragedies would mark the remaining years of his presidency, too, including the death of nephew Alfred Aiken in 1854. Perhaps the most supportive person to her during this trying time was Jane’s childhood friend and aunt by marriage, Abigail Atherton Kent Means, who would herself die prematurely in 1857. In September 1859, Jane took the occasion to scribble a note on the back of a letter originally dated June 1839: “1859 Sept – this box of the hair of my precious son has been with me in Europe – every where. The box was given to me by my dear, true friend Abby Means. So has my dear boys’ bible.” Although she would live for a decade more to come, Jane Pierce never fully recovered from the loss of her son.⁵⁴

⁵³ Benjamin Pierce to Jane Pierce, June 11, 1852; Jane Pierce to Benjamin Pierce, [n.d., ca. Jan. 1853]; Jane Pierce to Mary A. Aiken, [n.d., ca. April 1853] [M 2010 – 026]; all in Franklin Pierce Papers, boxes 2 and 3, folder 22 and 15, NHHS. For one account of the Pierce marriage during this period, see Michael J.C. Taylor, “‘A Hell on Earth’: The Pierce Marriage During the White House Years, 1853-1857,” in *Life in the White House: A Social History of the First Family and the President’s House*, ed. Robert P. Watson (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2004), 173-192.

⁵⁴ Franklin Pierce to John A. Aiken, Aug. 10, 1853, Franklin Pierce to Mary A. Aiken, Aug. 26, 1853, and Franklin Pierce to John A. Aiken, Aug. 19, 1854, Gilder Lehrman Collection, N-YHS. See the

From the outset of his presidency, then, Franklin Pierce faced a near inconsolable grief. While Jane Pierce mourned with her closest female friends, Franklin Pierce naturally turned toward male friendships to help ease the pain of loss. He invited twenty-two officers from his former brigade to the Executive Mansion soon after his inauguration. One of the men to join the new president was Benjamin B. French. He observed on one occasion: “But when Pierce comes in, and talk and laughs as in olden times, and jokes me about not writing his name elegant enough, and I tell him it is only envy, because my name is so much better looking than his, & c, & c, & c, and he complains of the troubles and trials of his office, and tells me how he is annoyed by applications for office,--the wire wears off and I forget my degradation, if such it may be called.” In the company of other men, Pierce could evidently find temporary comfort.⁵⁵

Requests for patronage flooded into the new president. The newspaper editor James Gordon Bennett indirectly requested the ambassadorship to France, citing how the job would be “the cap on the pyramid, the keystone in the arch” over his many critics. The president politely denied the request, offering the position instead to John Y. Mason of Virginia. In response to the snub, Bennett labeled him “Poor Pierce.” The *New York Herald* repeated the moniker throughout his administration and well into the later decades of the nineteenth century. Pierce was reluctant to award patronage jobs on the basis of friendship alone. “You cannot expect me to appoint you merely because we have been so many years personal friends,” Pierce informed Benjamin French in March. But this was precisely what other presidents had done and would

handwritten note by Jane Pierce on letter by Robert Appleton to Jane Pierce, June 9, 1839, Franklin Pierce Papers, box 1, folder 18, NHHS.

⁵⁵ James Gordon Bennett to Franklin Pierce, Dec. 15, 1852, *Franklin Pierce Papers*, reel 1; see also Boulard, *Expatriation of Franklin Pierce*, 8.

continue to do in the years ahead. For Pierce, the duties of office superseded commitments to those personal friends, especially for those with whom he had never been intimate.⁵⁶

The selection of cabinet officers reflected Pierce's interest in effecting harmony in the affairs of his administration. The president chose men who at least nominally had supported the compromise measures of two years prior (for example, Robert McClelland as Secretary of the Interior and Attorney General Caleb Cushing), and he wisely represented both southern and northern men among his advisers (James Guthrie, Secretary of the Treasury, was one of three Southerners). He also bowed to the pressures from James Buchanan to include a Pennsylvania man (James Campbell as Postmaster-General). With an assortment of political views assembled into one cabinet, strong executive leadership was required. Pierce's private secretary Sidney Webster later observed: "The elements of the Cabinet were such that, if left without a controlling chief, it would have broken asunder in a week." A strict interpreter of the Constitution, Pierce could not have played the part of "controlling chief" without his charismatic charm that had so long attracted warm affection from his many male colleagues.⁵⁷

Rather than assemble a "team of rivals," President Pierce pulled together an "Executive Family." He treated his cabinet officers in the same way that he had once embraced his boardinghouse "family" during his congressional years, as Varina Davis later remembered. This extension of the concept of the boardinghouse family, once a prominent feature of Pierce's congressional days, into an "Executive Family" meant that the cabinet and the president operated with a harmony unusual in the presidential administrations of the contemptuous Jacksonian period. Of course, Pierce's choice of a family risked insulation from the disparate points of view

⁵⁶ Wallner, *Franklin Pierce*, 2:6; Benjamin B. French to Henry F. French, April 17, 1853, French Family Papers, NHHS; French, *Witness to the Young Republic*, 234-35.

⁵⁷ Sydney Webster, *Franklin Pierce and His Administration* (New York: D. Appleton, 1892), 39; Wallner, *Franklin Pierce*, 2:7-8.

held across the nation. In retrospect, historians have observed that Pierce picked politicians who most strongly adhered to the states' rights wing of the party (like James Dobbins as Secretary of the Navy), as well as those northerners who straddled a moderate position, the so-called Soft-Shell faction (most notably, William Marcy, the new Secretary of State). The foremost trusted adviser in the new cabinet was Jefferson Davis as Secretary of War, to whom, even before he had agreed to join the cabinet, Pierce had confided to an unusual degree. In December 1852, Pierce had written: "I much desire to see you, and to avail myself in connection with the duties and responsibilities before me of your advice."⁵⁸

What about Jefferson Davis made him so trusted an adviser to Franklin Pierce? Personal acquaintances since 1838, their shared service in the United States Army in the Mexican War had bonded them into a common brotherhood (a commonality that Pierce shared with Caleb Cushing as well). Politically, they were likewise committed to the Democratic Party and the doctrine of states' rights, though not at the expense of party unity. Davis, like Pierce, wanted a "family re-union" of the Democrats. But another critical part of the glue of their relationship was how both men understood the proper expression of manhood and the place of friendship and family within it. As a student at Transylvania University, Davis formed intimate friendships with several classmates, including David R. Atchison (later senator from Missouri) and Clement C. Clay (later senator from Alabama), and delivered "An Address on Friendship," subsequently published in a local newspaper. Like Pierce, Davis had married for love and experienced personal loss: he wed his first wife, Sarah Knox Taylor (daughter of Zachary Taylor) in 1835,

⁵⁸ Varina H. Davis, *Jefferson Davis, Ex-President of the Confederate States of America: A Memoir*, 2 vols. (New York: Belford Co., 1890): 1:524; Nichols, *Franklin Pierce*, 247-52; Holt, *Franklin Pierce*, 50-52; Franklin Pierce to Jefferson Davis, Dec. 7, 1852 (copy), Franklin Pierce Papers, LC [full transcription in *Jefferson Davis Papers*, ed. Crist, 4:307-08]. For a comparison to the administration of Abraham Lincoln, see Doris K. Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

who died shortly thereafter. With his second wife, the charmingly young Varina Davis—she was only seventeen when they met—Davis would lose three of six children before full adulthood. Interestingly, the refined Davis found his closest friendships with senators from the North and Midwest. The Pierce and the Davis families became close, too, with Jane Pierce especially lavishing attention on the Davis's young child (his premature death in 1854 bonded them in bereavement). In sum, Jefferson Davis was a charismatic, likeable man, husband, and father, precisely the kind of friend that Franklin Pierce could rely upon on the most intimate level.⁵⁹

As president, Franklin Pierce found regular occasions to socialize with the men of Washington society. The chief executive offered small acts of kindness to personal friends without a second thought. During a snowstorm, he trekked to the home of the Alabama senator Clement C. and his young wife Virginia Clay, to deliver a framed portrait and spend a quiet night with the couple. Virginia Clay never forgot the “secret visit” of this “lovable man.” He took regular horseback rides into the county, fished along the Potomac River, and hosted poker games at the Executive Mansion, including one notable occasion in which he out-bluffed Senator Clay for fifty dollars. During their visits to the capital, Pierce's own extended family also called upon several of his cabinet members. In effect, then, Franklin Pierce enjoyed close relationships with many of his cabinet members as if they were his college “Chums” of old.⁶⁰

Perhaps the most controversial action of the Pierce administration was to support the Kansas and Nebraska bills that organized those territories for settlement. Historians have

⁵⁹ Jefferson Davis to ?, [ca. Aug.-Oct. 1852], *Papers of Jefferson Davis*, ed. Crist, 4:298. For an overview of Davis's early life, see Felicity Allen, *Jefferson Davis: Unconquerable Heart* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1999), esp. 2, 53-54; for his senatorial years, see Lynda L. Crist, “A ‘Duty Man’: Jefferson Davis as Senator,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 51 (1989): 281-95; and for the period of Pierce's cabinet, see William J. Cooper, Jr., *Jefferson Davis, American* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), esp. 240-76.

⁶⁰ Virginia Clay-Clopton, *A Belle of the Fifties*, ed. Ada Stirling (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Co. 1905), 60-62; Taylor, “A Hell on Earth,” 182-183; Mary E. Aiken to Mary A. Aiken, April 7, [1856], *Pierce-Aiken Papers Supplement*, ed. Boas, 48.

variously condemned and sustained, largely the former, Pierce's decision to support the bill's introduction and passage as a party measure. Roy Nichols thought the measure part of the "crazy romanticism of the decade," and in a later reevaluation, colorfully declared that the "great volcano of American politics was in a state of eruption." Pierce's most recent biographer, Peter Wallner, has argued that the new president faced little choice in how to respond to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. "In the end," Wallner writes, "Pierce acted on his constitutional principles and on his loyalty to his party." Michael Holt further supposed that Pierce hoped to reunite the "Democrats in the states who were at loggerheads over Pierce's misguided patronage policies, even more than preserving Democratic unity in Washington."⁶¹

In these criticisms, historians are not alone. Several of Pierce's closest family members also derided the bills. Abigail Means wrote to her niece Mary Appleton Aiken in late February 1854: "I do know that our Country was quiet until this *unnecessary & untimely* question has thrown fear and confusion among us." Alpheus S. Packard, brother-in-law of Jane Pierce, strongly opposed the bills; to Mary Appleton Aiken he wrote: "Would it not be a brotherly act for Mr. Aiken to write the President on this Nebraska infamy?" Jane Pierce herself likely doubted the wisdom of the measure. To her sister Frances Appleton Packard, she wrote in March, "I think [Franklin Pierce] would tell you that his conscience upholds mine in his present course, but I do not wish to talk for him. I earnestly desire that he may be guided by the 'wisdom wh[ic]h cometh from above.'" This trust in a higher power echoed Abigail Means's

⁶¹ Nichols, *Franklin Pierce*, 544; Nichols, "Kansas-Nebraska Act," 212; Wallner, *Franklin Pierce*, 2:98; Holt, *Franklin Pierce*, 79. See also Gara, *Presidency of Franklin Pierce*, 88-96.

assessment of Jane's own views, which hoped only "that all may be settled on the best and surest foundations."⁶²

If the president's closest family, and perhaps even his own wife, opposed the Kansas-Nebraska bill, who among of his advisers supported it? Here, again, the composition of his cabinet proved critical, for it was through the influence of Jefferson Davis that the bill's sponsors first introduced the measure to the president. Only one as close to the president as Davis could have convinced the religious Pierce to hold the meeting on a Sunday, and while few records overtly demonstrate Davis's influence in the president's support for the measure, there is little doubting that the Mississippian pushed the president in that direction. As he prepared to depart Washington in 1857, Pierce reportedly grasped Davis by the hand and said, "I can scarcely bear parting from you, who have been strength and solace to me for four anxious years and never failed me."⁶³

The 1856 national convention in Cincinnati proved to be a referendum on Franklin Pierce's administration. In a sign of their insulation from politics, few of Jane Pierce's family doubted his re-nomination. Franklin Pierce himself thought otherwise. Complaining to Mary Aiken of the exhaustion brought about by "incessant labor," he accurately predicted the results of the nominating convention: "I am inclined to think that you will be glad to have me express the opinion which I now entertain, that I shall not be nominated. The vote for me will be earnest, true and of a character to satisfy my pride – but Mr. Buchanan and Mr. Douglas will be able to

⁶² Abigail M. Means to Mary A. Aiken, Feb. 28, [1854]; and Alpheus S. Packard to Mary A. Aiken, Feb. 26, 1856, *Pierce-Aiken Papers*, ed. Boas, 27, 53; Jane Pierce to Frances A. Packard, Mar. 4, 1854, Franklin Pierce Collection, box 1, folder 11, BCL.

⁶³ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1881), 1:28; Varina Davis, *Jefferson Davis, Ex-President of the Confederate States of America: A Memoir*, 2 vols. (New York: Belford Co., 1890), 1:529-30; Jefferson Davis to Susan B. Dixon, Sept. 27, 1879, in Susan B. Dixon, *The True History of the Missouri Compromise and Its Repeal* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke Co., 1899), 457-60.

prevent a 2/3 vote....” At Cincinnati, the impossibly good luck that Hawthorne had once observed as the hallmark of his friend’s life finally ran out.⁶⁴

The news of James Buchanan’s nomination might have come as something of a relief to Pierce. As it had with so many men who occupied the White House, the office had aged him greatly. One observer remarked in January 1856: “The President looks old & care worn, and the cares of office are evidently too much for him, and are wearing him out...his face is full of wrinkles, & the press who run him very hard, no doubt contribute greatly to his annoyance.” The physical toll also brought about a parallel loss of support among even the most ardent of Pierce’s supporters in New Hampshire. Jeremiah Blodgett wrote to one colleague that the Nebraska resolutions had brought about “inevitable defeat...to him whom we have been proud to call New Hampshire Son.”⁶⁵

During the closing year of the Pierce administration, Jane and Franklin Pierce grew ever closer to their nephews and nieces. Of these kin, Harriet would be at her aunt’s side until the bitter end. The final months of Pierce’s presidency also presented an unexpected opportunity to reconnect with the family of past friends. Jonathan Prince Cilley, the son of Jonathan Cilley and enrolled as a student at Bowdoin College, visited Washington in December 1856 and spent considerable time with the president as his guest. “The President conversed very pleasantly with me for an hour or more,” Prince wrote to his mother from the president’s private office. Pierce and the young Cilley exchanged periodic letters, the older man always with an eye toward the

⁶⁴ John Francis Aiken to Mary A. Aiken, April 28, 1856, *Pierce-Aiken Papers Supplement*, ed. Boas, 47; and Franklin Pierce to Mary A. Aiken, [n.d., ca. 1856], *ibid.*, 61, 83-84.

⁶⁵ Diary entry, Jan. 1, 1856, Edward Neufville Tailer Diaries, 1848-1917, N-YHS; Jeremiah Blodgett to “Friend Webster,” Aug. 27, 1856, Jeremiah Blodgett Papers [1994 – 085 (M)], NHHS.

younger's education and financial prosperity. In later years, Pierce would take on a similar paternal benevolence toward Julian Hawthorne.⁶⁶

By the end of his administration in March 1857, Franklin Pierce was as unpopular as any president had ever been. While most of his political friends had abandoned him, President Pierce nevertheless still enjoyed the full support of his cabinet. In fact, Pierce did not lose a single member of his cabinet in the four years of his administration, a record that remains unmatched. On the eve of the inauguration of James Buchanan, the seven cabinet officers prepared a letter to the outgoing president. The cabinet was collectively and keenly aware of the toils exerted by their favored chief executive. "We confidently believe that, as time rolls on, the voice of impartial history will ratify our attestation of the integrity and patriotism of your exercise of the executive power of the United States," they declared. The next day, March 4, Pierce responded to his cabinet. "Your uninterrupted manifestation of personal friendship for me, during the past four years leaves no occasion for reassurance of your cordial regard, now that we are about to separate," he wrote. The president happily noted no "elements of discord," before reviewing his satisfaction with protecting strict constitutional principles and maintaining harmonious relations abroad. He concluded with a sincere hope for future friendship: "In my final retirement from active participation in public affairs, I shall observe the career which awaits you individually with the interest of constant and unabated friendship."⁶⁷

In the years ahead, however, Pierce would lose touch with all of his cabinet officers with one notable exception: Jefferson Davis. In a personal letter dated March 2, 1857, Davis

⁶⁶ Boas, ed., *Pierce-Aiken Papers*, 91-92; Wallner, *Franklin Pierce*, 2:254-55; Jonathan P. Cilley to Julia Draper Cilley, *A Breach of Privilege*, ed. Anderson, 387-88.

⁶⁷ See the copy of the letter from Members of the Cabinet to Franklin Pierce, Mar. 3, 1857, box 4, folder 6, NHHS. Because he wrote an individual letter to each cabinet member, many copies of these letters are extant; for example, see Franklin Pierce to Members of his Cabinet, Mar. 4, 1857, Literary and Historical Manuscripts, PML.

requested that Pierce copy selections of their correspondence “to leave to my son in remembrance of your much valued confidence and friendship for his Father.” The two men continued to write to one another, none more infamously than a long letter from Pierce dated January 6, 1860, in which he warned that “the fighting will not be along Mason's and Dixon's line merely.” A year later, Davis informed Pierce that Mississippi had determined to leave the Union and that he would naturally support this decision. Then the war came, complete with its resulting chaos. In July 1863, the Union army took possession of Davis's plantation, Brierfield, and confiscated numerous letters written from Pierce to Davis, including the aforementioned letter of January 6, 1860. The letter, once released to newspapers, further branded Pierce as a traitor.⁶⁸

After the war, with Davis imprisoned at Fortress Monroe, Pierce took the bold step to request to visit him. In 1867, he traveled from Concord to Virginia for what must stand as one of the most unusual visits of one ex-president to another (albeit of two different American polities). No record of their meeting survives, but the visit provided Davis an occasion to offer his highest compliments in a letter to Pierce: “8 May 1867...this day made bright by a visit of my beloved friend and ever-honored chief.” Pierce wrote back, offering Jefferson and Varina Davis to join him at his cottage on Little's Board Head for the summer season. To imagine the former president of the Confederacy sea-bathing on the New England coast with an ex-President of the United States might seem a bizarre pairing, but that such a visit was seriously contemplated

⁶⁸ The letters of Jefferson Davis have been definitively collected as Lynda Lasswell Crist et al, ed., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, 13 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1971-); also useful is Hudson Strode, ed., *Jefferson Davis: Private Letters, 1823-1889* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), esp. 109-111, 113-114, and 271-72. See also Jefferson Davis to Franklin Pierce, Mar. 2, 1853, *Franklin Pierce Papers* (microfilm, 7 reels, Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, 1959), reel 6; and Pierce to Davis, Jan. 6, 1860, and Davis to Pierce, Jan. 20, 1861, *Franklin Pierce Papers*, box 4, folders 9 and 13, NHHS.

suggests how the bonds of friendship could supersede even the most contested of political pasts.⁶⁹

Our Friend Hawthorne

As has already been noted, popular enthusiasm for the Democratic Party had reached new heights in the presidential campaign of 1852. The Democracy settled upon a persuasive slogan: “We Polked you in ’44, We shall Pierce you in ’52.” The Whigs retorted in turn that Pierce had been the “Hero of Many a Well Fought Battle.” In Boston, a group of Democratic boosters formed the first Granite Club to support the election of New Hampshire’s first presidential candidate. Soon other branches of the club sprouted up throughout the state and the region, extending to cities across the country (the phenomenon would be repeated in 1856 with the appropriately named Buck Clubs). Within days, newspapers had opened shop (“The Campaign” based out of Washington being one example), pamphlets variously deriding and defending the candidates (“Vindication of the Military Character and Services of General Franklin Pierce,” notable among them), and biographies had begun to appear, including one pamphlet offering “Sketches of the Lives” of the Democratic ticket. In short, the election occasioned a timely proliferation of printed materials about Pierce and King. Yet, with less than two months to the

⁶⁹ Jefferson Davis to Franklin Pierce, May 8, 1867, Franklin Pierce Papers, box 4, folder 18, NHHS; Franklin Pierce to Varina Davis, May 14, 1867, Samuel W. Richey Confederate Collection 1805-1936, volume 5, MU. Davis’s biographer describes the meeting as possessing a “special meaning” for Davis; see William Cooper, *Jefferson Davis, American* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 568.

Of note, Nathaniel Hawthorne repeatedly requested that Pierce obtain the autograph of Jefferson Davis; see Nathaniel Hawthorne to Franklin Pierce, July 26, 1863, Franklin Pierce Papers, box 5, folder 15, NHHS.

election, Franklin Pierce awaited the publication of one final campaign biography: that of his long-time friend Nathaniel Hawthorne.⁷⁰

Since their two years of overlap at Bowdoin College, Franklin Pierce and Nathaniel Hawthorne had not seen much of one another. Both men heard belatedly of the other man's wedding. Yet their friendship continued apace, most especially as Hawthorne had written eloquently in his eulogy of their former classmate Jonathan Cilley. In time, Pierce helped Hawthorne to obtain a job as collector of the port of Salem, which the latter dutifully accepted. In return, Hawthorne hoped to help Pierce however he could, writing in a prophetic letter from 1832: "It is a pity that I am not in a situation to exercise my pen in your behalf." It would not be the last time Hawthorne would think to offer his pen to Pierce.⁷¹

By the early 1840s, however, Pierce had "faded out" from Hawthorne's affections, as the author noted in a letter to classmate Henry W. Longfellow. The election of the Democrat James K. Polk brought about a reversal of fortunes, and soon Pierce and Hawthorne engaged in the appointment of lucrative patronage positions. After the Mexican War, Hawthorne attended a ceremony in Concord, New Hampshire, to see "Frank Pierce receive a sword," as he wrote to Longfellow in June 1849. When *The House of the Seven Gables* was published in 1851, Hawthorne instructed his publisher to send a copy first and foremost to Pierce, followed by a

⁷⁰ For example, Robert Armstrong, ed., *The Campaign*, Washington, June 12, 1852, No. 1 – April 1853 (Weekly); "Vindication of the Military Character and Services of General Franklin Pierce, By His Companions in Arms in Mexico" (1852); "Sketches of the Lives of Franklin Pierce and Wm. R. King, Candidates for the Democratic Republican Party for the Presidency and Vice Presidency of the United States" (1852). For an interpretation of the election of 1852 in New Hampshire, see Lex Renda, *Running on the Record: Civil War-Era Politics in New Hampshire* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 17-39; the gendered aspects of campaign rhetoric in the presidential elections of the 1850s are discussed in chapter 6.

⁷¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Franklin Pierce, June 28, 1832, *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Thomas Woodson et al, 15:223-25.

dozen other literary lights. With frequent visits possible between the two Concord, their friendship was probably closer than at any point since their college years.⁷²

Hawthorne heard of the news of Pierce's nomination on June 8. "It was not unexpected to me," the author declared in a letter the next day, but he also admitted, "I hardly know whether to congratulate you." Then, Hawthorne demonstrated a savvy initiative on a matter that he knew would be on the new candidate's mind: "It has occurred to me that you might have some thoughts of getting me to write the necessary biography." Hawthorne immediately demurred at the thought, claiming that his authorial style required greater care and lengthier consideration than the immediate publication timeline that a campaign biography might require. "I should write a better life of you after your term of office and life itself were over, than on the eve of an election," he said. But the new candidate and his party would not be satisfied with anything less than a biography from Hawthorne. In fact, Pierce had already dispatched Thomas Whipple to Concord to discuss the matter with Hawthorne.⁷³

From the transmission of his letter of June 9, Hawthorne focused exclusively on the unexpected new project. Given the political nature of the assignment, Hawthorne was proceeding onto tricky ground. His publisher, William D. Ticknor of Boston's Ticknor & Fields, was, in Hawthorne's cheeky phrase, "a bitter whig." But the author's own deep personal feelings for his subject concerned him more. Pierce was "a college-friend of mine, and we have been

⁷² For a sense of Hawthorne's associations with Pierce since graduation but prior to his nomination to the presidency, in addition to *ibid*, see esp. Hawthorne to Henry W. Longfellow, June 4, 1837; Hawthorne to John L. O'Sullivan, Mar. 15, 1840; Hawthorne to Horatio Bridge, May 3, 1843; all in *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Thomas Woodson et al, 15:251-54, 418-19, & 686-88; and Hawthorne to Bridge, June 10, 1845; Hawthorne to W.B. Pike, October 14, 1846; Hawthorne to Bridge, Oct. 26, 1846; Hawthorne to Charles G. Atherton, Dec. 23, 1848; Hawthorne to Longfellow, June 19, 1849; and Hawthorne to James T. Fields, Feb. 22, 1851; all in *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 16:102-103, 185, 188-189, 253-254, 283, & 398-399.

⁷³ Nichols, *Franklin Pierce*, 208-09; Nathaniel Hawthorne to Franklin Pierce, June 9, 1852, *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 16:545-46; Thomas J. Whipple to Franklin Pierce, [n.d., ca. June 1852], Franklin Pierce Papers, box 2, folder 17, NHHS.

intimate through life,” he wrote to James Fields. “But I seek nothing from him, and therefore need not be ashamed to tell the truth of an old friend.” Hawthorne spent the next several weeks diligently gathering material. In his correspondence with Pierce’s associates, Hawthorne continuously referred to himself as “an old friend” of the general. In spite of their new working relationship, Hawthorne clearly maintained something of the sarcastic humor that he knew Pierce enjoyed. “I am taking your life as fast as I can—murdering and mangling you. God forgive me; as I hope you will.” Hawthorne seized upon Pierce’s Mexican War diary, carefully editing the text to present the general as a bona fide war hero. In August, Hawthorne transmitted the final manuscript to Ticknor and Fields, thoroughly exhausted by the effort. The affair out of his hands, he took his family for a vacation along the Maine coast.⁷⁴

The finished manuscript was published on September 11, 1852, with a predictably divided reaction from Democrats and Whigs. Hawthorne remained supremely sensitive to partisan attacks against the character of Pierce. To Zachary Burchmore in September 1852, he inquired about a “derogatory” comment related to “the character of General P.” If the author’s loyalty to Pierce as a friend could not be shaken, Hawthorne yet seemed embarrassed by his association with the text. “I did not send you the *Life of Pierce*,” he wrote to his literary colleague Horatio Bridge, “not considering it one of my literary productions.” The primary reason for undertaking the work, Hawthorne admitted, was Pierce’s insistence, to whom “after a friendship of thirty years, it was impossible to refuse my best efforts in his behalf, at the great

⁷⁴ For Hawthorne’s letters relevant to the research, writing, and subsequent reception of *Life of Pierce*, see esp. Nathaniel Hawthorne to William D. Ticknor, June 13, 1852; Hawthorne to James T. Fields, June 17, 1852, Hawthorne to John H. George, June [ca. 20], 1852, Hawthorne to Franklin Pierce, June 24, 1852, Hawthorne to Pierce, July 5, 1852, Hawthorne to Ticknor, July 7, 1852, Hawthorne to Pierce, July 27, August 6, 1852, Hawthorne to Ticknor, [ca. Aug. 12], Aug. 22, Aug. 25, Aug. 27, Sept. 2, and Sept. 7, 1852, and Hawthorne to Elizabeth Hawthorne, [ca. Sept. 26, 1852], *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 16:547, 550-51, 557, 559, 560-62, 564-65, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588-89, 590-91, 592, 595, & 597.

pinch of his life.” Although Hawthorne did not hold out much hope for Pierce’s election, the results that November proved him wrong: Pierce swept the Electoral College as no Democrat had since Andrew Jackson. As a measure of his appreciation, the president-elect commissioned noted portrait artist George Healey to paint a still life of Hawthorne (the second such time Pierce had paid for a rendering).⁷⁵

Hawthorne’s *Life of Pierce* slyly innovated the genre of the campaign biography. On the one hand, his biography followed standard narrative conventions by representing Franklin Pierce as a Cincinnatus-like figure and a strict Jacksonian partisan. On the other hand, Hawthorne’s deployment of intimate male friendship utilized a sentimental literary trope found within many of his novels, including the recently published *The Blithedale Romance*. The author claimed that his portrait of Pierce was superior because it had been “sketched by one who had had opportunities of knowing him well, and who is certainly inclined to tell the truth.” In short, his friendship with Pierce validated the authenticity of the biography. Coming late to the public’s gaze, and only subsequent to other campaign tracts, Hawthorne’s *Life of Pierce* actually did more to cement their friendship than it did to aid Pierce’s election. Certainly, the publication of the biography hurt his reputation among the New England literary circle, which excoriated the reclusive romancer of American literature as a commercial and political sellout.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Zachary Burchmore, Sept. 26, 1852, and Hawthorne to Horatio Bridge, Oct. 13, 1852, *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 16:599, 604-09.

⁷⁶ Hawthorne, *Life of Pierce*, 1. Hawthorne’s *Life of Pierce* has received its fair share of scholarly attention; see Lee H. Warner, “Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Making of the President—1852,” *Historical New Hampshire* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 20-36; Richard Boyd, “The Politics of Exclusion: Hawthorne’s *Life of Franklin Pierce*,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* n.s. 3 (1989): 337-51; Scott E. Casper, “The Two Lives of Franklin Pierce: Hawthorne, Political Culture, and the Literary Market,” *American Literary History* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 203-30; and Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography & Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1999), esp. 193-201; Leland S. Person, “A Man for the Whole Country: Marketing Masculinity in the Pierce Biography,” *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review* 35, no. 1 (Spring, 2009): 1-22; and Nancy F. Sweet, “Pragmatic Politics and the Dream of Heroism: Hawthorne’s *Life of Pierce* and *Tanglewood Tales*,” *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 138-164. Less well studied how Pierce’s figured in Hawthorne’s other

Many years later, Nathaniel Hawthorne's son and chief literary executor, Julian Hawthorne, offered the assessment that *The Life of Pierce* was a "work of friendship" and his father's subsequent consular assignment a completely "friendly act." But such an assertion obscures the distinctly political aspects of Hawthorne's life, to say nothing of their friendship. Hawthorne himself observed that Pierce's friendships "have a tendency to be rather sentimental than practical." Perhaps aware of this tendency, Hawthorne had attempted from the beginning of Pierce's rise to political power to benefit as much as possible. Beginning with his effort to obtain a position on the South Sea Exploring Expedition in 1837 and continuing to the dedication of *Our Old Home* to Pierce in 1863, Hawthorne engaged repeatedly, and with relative success, in the realm of Democratic politics, aligned fully in the political orbit of Franklin Pierce. For the most part, these political forays carried with them weighty financial rewards: the plum job as collector of the Salem Custom House, for example, enabled Hawthorne to support his family, when the income from his literary efforts proved insufficient. From the outset of Pierce's nomination to the presidency, Hawthorne sensed an opportunity to assist his old friend. It was Hawthorne, after all, who first approached Pierce with his services. The lure of the financial benefit associated with political patronage was simply too great for the author.⁷⁷

literary works; for an impressive start in this direction, see Richard J. Williamson, *The Impact of Franklin Pierce on Nathaniel Hawthorne: Friendship, Politics, and the Literary Imagination* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

⁷⁷ While Hawthorne's *Life of Pierce* proved to be neither a commercial success nor decisive to the outcome of the election of 1852, the extant copies of the books provide an unexpectedly rich source of manuscript materials. In one such copy held by the New York Public Library, Julian Hawthorne inscribed a note in 1919 about the work and his father's relationship to Franklin Pierce: "This campaign biography was a work of friendship by Hawthorne, undertaken at Pierce's suggestion. He had been a classmate of Hawthorne's in Bowdoin, and they were dear friends in the time of Hawthorne's death in May, 1864, when Pierce was with him. Pierce appointed Hawthorne consul to Liverpool in 1853, not as payment of a political debt, but as a friendly act to a man he loved." Julian Hawthorne, Nov. 2, 1919, in flyleaf of Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Life of Pierce* (call no. 8-*KL), Rare Books Division, NYPL. Nathaniel Hawthorne to Charlotte M. Bridge, May 18, 1853, *Centenary Edition of the Works of the Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 16:684-85. On Hawthorne's engagement with politics, in addition to *op. cit.* see esp., Paul Cortisoz, "The Political Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne" (Ph.D. diss., New York Univ.,

With Pierce's election to the presidency, Hawthorne quietly looked forward to his recompense. In October, just before the election, Hawthorne enjoyed an albeit too brief meeting with Pierce; to Bridge, he later wrote: "Frank was as free and kind, in our personal interviews, as ever he was in our college days, but his public attentions to me were few and by no means distinguished." The two men might have discussed Hawthorne's potential appointment as consul to Liverpool, though Hawthorne remained ever publicly distant from the political process. To Bridge, however, Hawthorne was quite candid about the matter: "He certainly owes me something; for the biography has cost me hundreds of friends." Mixed in with the sense of obligation, Hawthorne could not deny his feelings for Pierce: "I love him; and, oddly enough, there is a kind of pitying sentiment mixed up with my affection for him, just now."⁷⁸

In the meanwhile, Hawthorne himself was beseeched for autographs of the president-elect. By February 1853, he still regularly enjoyed the general's company. The Hawthorne family, too, enjoyed familiarity with "Emperor Frank." In the week following Pierce's inauguration in March, Hawthorne still disavowed his skills as a political operator, writing to Zachary Burchmore about a position in the Salem Customs House: "I am no politician, and therefore ought not to pretend to advise you." In other ways, though, Hawthorne was as political as any other powerful Democrat in 1850s America. Hawthorne admitted to another correspondent that "I have had had as many office-seekers knocking at my door, for three

1955); Warren Gould, "Nathaniel Hawthorne, Franklin Pierce and the Presidential Election of 1852" (M.A. thesis, George Washington Univ., 1955); Larry A. Martin, "Out of the Solitary Chamber: The Politics of Nathaniel Hawthorne" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Tennessee at Knoxville, 1980); William Jenkins, "Nathaniel Hawthorne, Politician," *Cimarron Review* (1986): 37-44; and Michael T. Gilmore, "Hawthorne and Politics (Again): Words and Deeds in the 1850s," in *Hawthorne and the Real: Bicentennial Essays*, ed. Millicent Bell (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2005): 22-39. Wineapple (2003) sidesteps the question of Hawthorne's political ambition, concluding that the Pierce and Hawthorne "sought and found in each the comfort of a thirty-year friendship and the full acceptance neither had discovered elsewhere, despite all their success" (265).

⁷⁸ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Horatio Bridge, Dec. 21, 1854, and Hawthorne to Bridge, Oct. 13, 1852, *Centenary Edition of the Works of the Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 17:298-99 & 16:604-09.

months past, as if I were a prime minister.” By month’s end he had been appointed and confirmed as the nation’s consul to Liverpool, England. Before Hawthorne’s departure in July, the author spent considerable time with the Pierce family, including a trip to visit Washington’s tomb at Mount Vernon (this despite Jane Pierce’s strict mourning for the loss of son Benny).⁷⁹

With Hawthorne and his family across the Atlantic Ocean, the two men did not see one another for the next five years. Their friendship began to show signs of strain under the pressures of distance. Neither did they exchange many letters, since Pierce was preoccupied with the duties of the presidency (he did transmit occasional letters of introduction to Hawthorne). Hawthorne primarily worked through Horatio Bridge, now in Washington as chief of the Bureau of Provisions and Clothing in the U.S. Navy, to reach the president. In his letters Hawthorne often wrote very detailed accounts of his affairs as consul, recording the particulars of the expenditures of the office. When the occasional note from the president did arrive, Hawthorne breathed a sigh with relief: “Unquestionably [Pierce] is a true man and a true friend.” But these notes were few and far between, in part fueled by Hawthorne’s own hesitancy to write. To Bridge he mused, “I ought to write to [Pierce]; but it is a devilish sight harder to write to the President of the United States (especially when he has been an intimate friend) than to a private man.” Hawthorne was also scathing of the first family—he adopted James G. Bennett’s phrase,

⁷⁹ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Charles Corbitt, Jan. 27, 1853, Hawthorne to Charlotte M. Bridge, Feb. 7, 1853, Hawthorne to William D. Ticknor, Feb. 26, 1853, Hawthorne to Zachary Burchmore, Mar. 14, 1853, Hawthorne to R.H. Stoddard, Mar. 16, 1853, Hawthorne to Ticknor, Mar. 28, 1853, Hawthorne to Sophia Hawthorne, April 28, 1853, *Centenary Edition of the Works of the Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 16:633, 634-35, 642, 645-46, 648-49, 658, & 679. For the descriptions of Hawthorne and Pierce used by the family, see also Sophia Hawthorne to Nathaniel Peabody, Feb. 20, 1853, Sophia Peabody Hawthorne Collection of Papers 1775-1944 (Berg Coll MSS Hawthorne, S), NYPL.

when he called Franklin “poor Pierce,” and he said of Jane, “I wish he had a better wife, or none at all.”⁸⁰

Hawthorne’s remark about Jane Pierce suggests that failure of the companionate marriage in face of personal tragedy. Although recent scholarship has shown that Jane Pierce met the social obligations of the Executive Mansion, especially in later years, her appetite for social life was minimal. The gendered conventions of mourning in antebellum America required a woman who had lost a child to observe a minimum of two years of formal mourning, a custom that Jane Pierce followed for even longer (she wore black and wrote letters on mourning stationery well into the 1850s). By contrast, men were expected to return to the duties of public life at a sooner rate. With Franklin Pierce sooner capable of meeting social obligations and Jane Pierce observant of mourning practices, the social life of the administration was notably diminished. The role of friendship became ever more important, though with opposite results: Jane Pierce turned more deeply inward and relied with greater intensity on her aunt and family friend, Abigail Means, while Franklin Pierce relished his friendships with Jefferson Davis, Clement C. Clay, and other like-minded Democrats. Ultimately, the gendered power of male and female

⁸⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Horatio Bridge, Aug. 31, Dec. 14, 1854, *Centenary Edition of the Works of the Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 17:253, 292-94. Since the Jackson administration, consular assignments had been a preferred method of to support the careers of American authors; on this point see Amanda Claybaugh, “The Consular Service and U.S. Literature: Nathaniel Hawthorne Abroad,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 284-89. For an overview of Hawthorne’s time in England, see James O’Donald Mays, *Mr. Hawthorne Goes to England: The Adventures of a Reluctant Consul* (Burley, Ringwood, Hampshire: New Forest Leaves, 1983), esp. 107-117. The primary duties of consul required frequent dispatches to James Buchanan, the American Minister to the Court of St. James, along with various other letters related to Americans’ business in England. To record his observations, always with an eye toward future publication, Hawthorne began to keep a journal; these thoughts would be published posthumously as *The English Notebooks* in 1870, carefully edited by Sophia Hawthorne. For one of the few surviving letters from Pierce to Hawthorne during this period, see the letter from Franklin Pierce to Nathaniel Hawthorne, June 6, 1854, attached to the frontispiece in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Life of Pierce* (call no. *KL Hawthorne), Rare Books Division, NYPL.

friendships, respectively, succeeded the importance of companionate marriage in the lives of the two bereaved Pierces.⁸¹

In an unexpected turn of events, Hawthorne had many more occasions to interact with a future president than he did with the sitting one. The relationship of Hawthorne as consul to the American minister James Buchanan has merited little attention, even from the usually exhaustive reach of Hawthorne scholars. The two men developed a productive working relationship and a warm personal friendship in England. Hawthorne thought that Buchanan could not “exactly be called gentlemanly in his manners, there being a sort of rusticity about him,” going on to describe his physical comportment in fine detail. Neither did Hawthorne refrain from recording gossip about the old man, noting in a line later excised by Sophia Hawthorne that his awkward carriage of head was “in consequence, as the old scandal says, of having once attempted to cut his throat.” Yet Hawthorne reported to William Ticknor about Buchanan that he “liked him better than I expected.” Important to Hawthorne’s conception of proper manhood, Buchanan “takes his wine like a true man, loves a good cigar, and is doubtless as honest as nine diplomatists out of ten.” In sum, Hawthorne concluded an entry in his journal: “I like Mr. Buchanan.”⁸²

Upon Buchanan’s resignation and subsequent replacement by the Pierce partisan George M. Dallas, Hawthorne felt disgusted, calling the new ambassador (later edited out) a “stale old fogy.” In comparison to Dallas, Hawthorne told his publisher that Buchanan was “worth ten of him.” A few days later in a letter to Sophia Hawthorne, Old Buck’s merit had doubled: he was

⁸¹ On mourning practices in antebellum America, see Robert W. Habenstein and William L. Lamers, “The Patter of Late Nineteenth-Century Funeral,” in *Passing: The Vision of Death in America*, ed. Charles O. Jackson (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977): 91-102; and antebellum perceptions of death more generally, see Lewis O. Saum, “Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America,” *American Quarterly* 26, no. 5 (Dec. 1974): 477-95.

⁸² Hawthorne, diary entries for January 6, September 13, 25, 1855, *English Notebooks*.

now “worth twenty of him.” With Buchanan’s election in 1856, suddenly Hawthorne could count a second political friend in the highest office of the land. Since the two men were variously “personally friends” and “very good friends,” Hawthorne fully expected to resign from the consulship on his own terms, and in turn Buchanan was “very gracious and complimentary” toward Hawthorne, allowing the author to resign from the consulship in August. Perhaps for this reason, Nathaniel Hawthorne always held a special place for James Buchanan, even well into the Civil War.⁸³

While Hawthorne was completing his consular service in England, Franklin and Jane Pierce were preparing to head overseas. By November 1857, the most likely destination was the Island of Madeira in the Atlantic Ocean. To James Alexander Hamilton, son of Alexander Hamilton, Pierce reported his weariness: “I am sick of engagements and have only time to add that wherever we may be we shall remember you with the affectionate interest, which belongs to a cherished friend.” With the Navy frigate *Powhatan* placed at the Pierces’ disposal by President Buchanan, the couple set sail before the end of the year, they spent remainder of the winter months in the spacious home of a political friend. Pierce did not lie idle on the beach, however, as he remained keenly interested in political developments with the new Buchanan administration. To George Dallas in England, he wrote: “Does it not sound oddly enough to hear Judge Douglas denouncing a servile and corrupt press and discussing the question whether he is

⁸³ Hawthorne, diary entry, Mar. 15, 1856, *English Notebooks*. Nathaniel Hawthorne to William D. Ticknor, April 30, 1854, and Mar. 15, 1856, Hawthorne to Sophia Hawthorne, March 18, 1856, Hawthorne to Horatio Bridge, Dec. 19, 1856, *Centenary Edition of the Works of the Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 17:210-211, 453-54, 455-58, & 587-88. Hawthorne even petitioned Buchanan for patronage appointments for his own friends back in New England; see Hawthorne to James Buchanan, January 31, 1857, Hawthorne to William D. Ticknor, Feb. 13, 1857, and Hawthorne to William A. Wheeler, Jan. 7, 1863, *ibid.*, 18:12, 21-22, & 518-20. Although Hawthorne despised Dallas, Pierce ensured that the Pennsylvanian’s son would be appointed as secretary of the legation; see Franklin Pierce to George M. Dallas, Jan. 28, 1856, and Dallas to Pierce, Jan. 29, 1856, Franklin Pierce Papers, RL.

indeed in or out of the Democratic party? These early open divisions certainly do not augur well.”⁸⁴

The Pierces spent the first of several winters abroad, primarily to benefit Jane’s health. To Lewis Cass, installed as Buchanan’s secretary of state, Pierce wrote: “She now rides on horseback in fine weather and begins to entertain pretty sanguine hopes that she may be able to visit the continent in the early part of next summer.” Pierce also looked forward to spending time with Hawthorne: “I dwell with much satisfaction upon the prospect of meeting Hawthorne and of passing perhaps a few months with him at some agreeable place on the Continent,” he wrote to Bridge. Finally, on March 10, 1859, Pierce surprised Hawthorne in Rome with a visit of several weeks. When Una Hawthorne, the teenaged child of the Hawthornes, fell ill, Pierce proved himself the caring soul that he had been during his own son’s illness in 1844. Sophia Hawthorne recorded that “General Pierce came three times a day. I think I owe to him, almost, my husband’s life.” Indeed, Nathaniel Hawthorne later wrote in his notebook: “I shall always love him the better for the recollection of his ministrations in these dark days.” On April 19, the Pierces left Italy and continued to sojourn across Europe. The departure left a lasting impression upon Hawthorne, who wrote of Pierce: “Well; I have found him, here in Rome, the whole of my early friend, and even better than I used to know him.”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Franklin Pierce to James A. Hamilton, Nov. 5, 1857, James A. Hamilton Papers, 1740-1870 (MssColl 1299), box 1, NYPL; Franklin Pierce to George M. Dallas, Jan. 20, 1858, Gilder Lehrman Collection, NYHS.

⁸⁵ Franklin Pierce to Lewis Cass, Mar. 5, 1858, Charlton Thomas Lewis Papers, YUL; Nathaniel Hawthorne to Pierce, Oct. 27, 1858, and Hawthorne to Ticknor, Mar. 4, 1859, *Centenary Edition of the Works of the Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 18:156-157, & 163-165; Franklin Pierce to Horatio Bridge, Mar. 28, 1858, box 1, folder 22, BCL. For Hawthorne’s account of meeting in *The French and Italian Notebooks*, see Woodson et al, ed., *Centenary Edition of the Works of the Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 14:507-19, here 519. For Sophia Hawthorne’s journal, see Hawthorne, *Memories*, 371. About their friendship, Robert Milder has written: “Hawthorne’s tribute to him is among the most deeply felt celebrations of friendship in all of the notebooks”; see Milder, *Hawthorne’s Habitations: A Literary Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 341.

The renewal of their friendship abroad translated into an equally revitalized intimacy at home. Hawthorne even constructed an anagram for his friend: “Princelie Frank.” In February 1862, the two men took to drinking to forget the horrors of war all around them. Pierce remained ever the patriot. “He is bigoted to the Union,” Hawthorne reported, “whereas, I...not much regret an ultimate separation.” A year passed without another visit. Then, in 1863, Hawthorne prepared to publish his manuscript about his sojourn to England, titled *Our Old Home*. For a dedication, he chose Pierce, writing, “To Franklin Pierce, / As a Slight Memorial of a College Friendship, prolonged through Manhood, and retaining all its Vitality in our Autumnal Years, / This Volume is inscribed by NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.” Aware that his association with Pierce could again harm his literary reputation, Hawthorne wrote to his sister: “The Dedication can hurt nobody but my book and myself.” If his *Life of Pierce* in 1852 had signaled a willingness to travel the path of politics, the dedication of *Our Old Home* in 1863 solidified the end of a journey as the nation’s leading light of the Democratic literati. The solidly Republican phalanx of New England literary society would never forgive him (Emerson excised the dedication from his own copy of the book). But Hawthorne did not care. To his publisher he declared: “My long and intimate personal relations with Pierce render the dedication altogether proper....”⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Hawthorne, *Memories*, 429; Nathaniel Hawthorne to Horatio Bridge, Feb. 13, 1862; Jan. 21, 1863; Hawthorne to James T. Fields, July 18, 1863; Hawthorne to Elizabeth Peabody, July 20, 1863; *Centenary Edition of the Works of the Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 18:427-29, 526-27, 586-94. On Emerson’s excision of the dedication to *Our Old Home*, see the diary of Annie Fields, *Microfilm Edition of the Annie Adams Fields Papers, 1852-1912* (microfilm, 3 reels, Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1981), reel 1, extracts of which were published as Fields, *Authors and Friends* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1896), esp. 72; as well as Fields, “Glimpses of Emerson,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 68 (Feb. 1884): 457-68, esp. 459. Hawthorne also compared his dedication to Pierce in *Our Old Home* to his memorial to Jonathan Cilley nearly thirty years earlier, writing to Elizabeth Peabody that he had to “admire the valor and generous pertinacity with which you come again to the scratch, offering me the same kind of advice as when I was going to write the *Life of Cilley*, and the *Life of Peirce*, and which availed nothing, then as now, because I trusted to my own instinct to guide me into my own right way.” Hawthorne to Elizabeth Peabody, July 20, 1863, *op cit*, 18:589-94. For more on the

One final journey remained to Hawthorne, and fittingly, this trip would be in the company of Franklin Pierce. The two men had begun to plan an excursion as early as October 1863, but Jane Pierce's health was failing. She passed away on December 2, though not without a fight. As niece Harriet Aiken Lord wrote of the occasion: "I am amazed when I recall the energy she manifested at times when I am sure she was entirely unfit to do anything." After Jane's death, Franklin Pierce turned to Hawthorne for support. By the spring of 1864, Hawthorne himself had become so seriously ill that he could barely lift a pen; a change of scenery was thought to be healthful. In what would be his last surviving letter, Hawthorne wrote to Pierce about preparations for the trip. "My own health continues rather poor, but I shall hope to revive rapidly when once we are on the road," the author said. With the promise of improved health and the allure of travel with a friend, Hawthorne and Pierce set out for the White Mountains of New Hampshire.⁸⁷

On Wednesday, May 18, the two travelers arrived at the fashionable Pemigewasset House in Plymouth, New Hampshire. With Hawthorne deathly ill, Franklin Pierce signed the hotel's register for them both. That night, the great giant of American literature passed away in his sleep. Pierce dutifully composed a number of telegrams with the news. To Ralph Waldo Emerson, the ex-president wrote: "Our friend Mr. Hawthorne died here this morning about three o'clock without the slightest struggle & evidently without suffering." To Hawthorne's publishers, Ticknor and Fields, Pierce reiterated the note to Emerson: "Dear Hawthorne died here this morning without the slightest struggle & evidently without suffering," noting also that Emerson

controversy surrounding the dedication of *Our Old Home*, see also Randall Stewart, "Hawthorne and the Civil War," *Studies in Philology* 34, no. 1 (Jan. 1937): 91-106; and Woodson et al, ed., *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 5:xiii-xli.

⁸⁷ Harriet A. Lord to Mary A. Aiken, [ca. Dec. 1863], *Pierce-Aiken Papers*, ed. Boas, 94-95; Nathaniel Hawthorne to Franklin Pierce, May 7, 1864, *Centenary Edition of the Works of the Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Woodson et al, 18:655.

would inform Hawthorne's family in Concord. At the funeral, Pierce sat with the Hawthorne family, comforting the bereaved widow Sophia Hawthorne. Longfellow, Emerson, and the other pallbearers (all New England literary men), all of whom had so regretted Hawthorne's associations with Pierce, likely watched the scene with dismay. "You have doubtless read some description of Hawthorne's funeral," Longfellow reported to Charles Sumner. "It was a lovely day - the village all sunshine and blossoms, and song of birds. You can not imagine anything at once more sad and beautiful."⁸⁸

Even after Hawthorne's death, Pierce continued to protect the author's memory. Now it was the ex-President's turn to field requests for autographs. "I think I have had more than a hundred urgent applications for dear Hawthorne's autograph and do not believe that I have one more to spare," he reported with frustration in December 1867. After rereading all of the author's published works, Pierce was "more than ever impressed" with his old friend. If he had obtained a rare copy of Hawthorne's *Fanshawe*, he might have seen something of himself in the "manly and dignified" (and hard-drinking) character of Edward Walcott. Likewise, it is unknown if he had access to Hawthorne's unfinished manuscripts, *Septimius Felton* and *Septimius Norton*, which bear traces of Pierce's influence. Most likely, the sheer breadth of Hawthorne's works and the vivid portraits presented in his fiction were enough.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Wallner, "Franklin Pierce and Bowdoin College Associates Hawthorne and Hale," 43; telegram from Franklin Pierce to Ralph Waldo Emerson, May 19, 1864, Misc. Hawthorne, PML, box 2; telegram from Franklin Pierce to Mr. [George Ticknor] Fields, May 19, 1864, *ibid*; Henry W. Longfellow to Charles Sumner, May 25, 1864, *Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Hilen, 4:413. For Pierce's account of Hawthorne's final hours, see Franklin Pierce to Horatio Bridge, May 21, 1864, in Horatio Bridge, *Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York: Harper & Row, 1893), 176-179.

⁸⁹ See the letter tipped into the flyleaf of Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Life of Pierce* (call no. Val./B/P61ha), Franklin Pierce to Charles H. Bell, Dec. 13, 1867, Franklin Pierce Letter (acc. # 867663.1), RDL. For Pierce's comment on rereading Hawthorne's work, see Franklin Pierce to Horatio Bridge, Nov. 27, 1865, box 1, folder 26, BCL. Williams, *Impact of Franklin Pierce on Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 45, 153: "Pierce seemed to serve Hawthorne as a faithful hero and protector."

In his last years, Pierce enjoyed the comforts of few friends, residing alone at a boarding house in Concord, New Hampshire. His White House private secretary, Sidney Webster, had married and moved to New York. President Andrew Johnson, a man with whom Pierce found much to sympathize, had been replaced by Ulysses S. Grant. The new administration excited “little interest” in Pierce, who complained bitterly and sarcastically in a letter about the appointment of an African American man from Massachusetts to the office of postmaster in Georgia. One exception was Hamilton Fish, now secretary of state in the Grant administration, with whom Pierce had long been friendly (the Pierces stayed with the Fishes in Philadelphia following his retirement from the presidency). But they were all distant to him now. Alone in his boarding house in Concord, Franklin Pierce slipped away, drawing his last breath on October 8, 1869. Not a single friend remained to him.⁹⁰

* * * * *

Franklin Pierce undeniably suffered a great deal during his lifetime. He lived through the death of his three children, the death of his wife, and the death of numerous friends. In the loss of this final group, that of his many intimate male friends, he might have felt the greatest sense of disappointment with his public life. While the Pierces could be described as sharing a companionate marriage, there were limits to the emotional content that they could share with one another. In the times of greatest hardship, Jane turned to the comforts of her sisters, Mary Aiken and Frances Packard, and her friend and aunt Abigail Means. In their White House years and beyond, each preferred to spend his or her final days with their friends and family, and not with each other. Not surprisingly, then, Franklin Pierce turned to male companionship, most notably to Nathaniel Hawthorne, to help him throughout the many tragedies of his life. Like many elites

⁹⁰ Franklin Pierce to Sidney Webster, June 4, 1869, Gilder Lehrman Collection, N-YHS.

born into the generation after the Revolution, Pierce lived in a world where he could confide his deepest emotions to other men.

In this arena of politics, Franklin Pierce could not rely upon the support of Jane Appleton Pierce, whose overwhelming grief at the loss of her children and general disdain for all things political. To fill the void, he immersed himself in the homosocial world that he had first experienced at Bowdoin and tried throughout his life to sustain in various settings. Whether during legislative sessions in Concord, during the meetings of the Aztec Club, or at cabinet meetings at the White House, Pierce relied upon friendship to accomplish political goals. Perhaps this alchemical mix formed the basis of Pierce's incredible luck observed so keenly by Hawthorne. At the start of Pierce's presidential administration, William Rufus King warned the incoming President pro temp of the Senate, David Rice Atchison, of the importance of picking the right men for the cabinet: "If only he will draw around him able, intelligent, and virtuous men, his administration cannot fail to be imminently prosperous, failing in that he will not only get along badly, but contribute to the disorganization, if not, the entire breaking of the democratic party." In his selection of Jefferson Davis, most notably, Pierce too greatly valued the pleasant harmony of male friendship, and not enough the wisdom of men who shared his deep commitment to the preservation of the Union.⁹¹

Upon the news of Pierce's death in 1869, Benjamin French recorded one last entry in his diary about the man, noting how he "expected much more from him than I received" while president. Although the two men had long since split over the issue of slavery, French could not help but reflect on the significance of their friendship. "Franklin Pierce and I were intimate friends from about 1825 to the time he took his seat as President...No living man knew Franklin Pierce, from his young manhood to the day when he left Washington the last time, better than I

⁹¹ William R. King to David R. Atchison, February 20, 1853, Atchison Papers, box 1, folder 3, MOHS.

did.” For French, the intimacy of their friendship could be captured and demarcated by a period of years. The clear break that occurred between the two men after Pierce’s inauguration was not unique to French. By contrast, Franklin Pierce always hoped that the intimacy of male friendship might last a lifetime.⁹²

Perhaps the greatest difference between Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan was the intensity of their respective male friendships. Buchanan’s friendship with William Rufus King proved to be the most important of his lifetime, lasting some twenty years and enabling great political success for both men. In contrast, Pierce seemed to make and then lose a series of close male friends, beginning with his collegiate and legal education, extending to his initial legislative and congressional service, continuing through his wartime service, his presidency, and finally his retirement from the Executive Mansion. During this time, different men held varying degrees of importance to him, but other than Hawthorne, none lasted beyond a defined period of in the life of Pierce. Of all these, perhaps the greatest friendship—that with Hawthorne—belongs to the one which lasted the longest and experienced renewed intimacy in later life. Given the numerous tragedies that afflicted Pierce throughout his life, the near monogamous model of Buchanan and King ultimately proved a more propitious and effective way forward for political men of the antebellum era.

⁹² French, *Witness to the Young Republic*, ed. Cole and McDonough, 604.

CHAPTER 3:

AT HOME WITH MASON AND HUNTER

“A short time, therefore, after going to Washington, he adopted a plan...of forming what he called ‘a mess,’ and combining with two or three other gentlemen, taking a house and living together as one family.”

--Virginia Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James Murray Mason* (1903)

Practically from the moment David Atchison boarded Stephen Douglas’s carriage, controversy has surrounded the introduction of the bills that became the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The day after the bill had been introduced, the *New York Herald* reported on the meeting between the Southerners and Douglas, suggesting a conspiracy of the first order. More than one hundred and fifty years later, historians still question the unusual circumstance of the bills’ introduction, arguing over the motives and the extent of involvement of the key players, particularly Douglas and Atchison. While many have noted the connection among Atchison and his messmates, one going so far as to call them “congenial spirits,” few historians have explored the nature of their living arrangements in Washington, or for that matter, how such arrangements influenced the introduction of the territorial organization bill. Such reconsideration of the members of the F Street mess is long overdue, especially given its widespread prevalence in accounts of the coming of the Civil War.¹

¹ In the first century of scholarship on the act, the most important historiographical review of the Kansas-Nebraska remains Nichols, “The Kansas-Nebraska Act,” here 201. Still relevant works from this first century of scholarship include Elmer Craik, “Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1858,” *Proceedings of the Kansas State Historical Society* (1922): 322-450; Frank H. Hodder, “The Genesis of the Kansas-Nebraska Act,” *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for 1912* (Madison, Wisc., 1913): 69-86; Hodder, “The Railroad Background of the Kansas-Nebraska Act,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 12, no. 1 (June, 1925): 3-22; and Ray, *The Repeal of the Missouri Compromise*. Since Nichols’s article, several accounts have been helpful, though usually with only passing mention to the members of the F Street Mess: see Robert R. Russel, “The Issues in the Congressional Struggle Over the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, 1854,” *Journal of Southern History* 29, no. 2 (1963): 187-210; Gerard Wolff,

Although mostly forgotten figures today, the four principles of the F Street mess were well known to contemporaries. Of all of the messmates, James Murray Mason was the guiding spirit. The South Carolina congressman Isaac Holmes thought Mason a “man of sound sense, and an accomplished Gentleman,” while John W. Forney, the congressional clerk and newspaper editor, recalled how Mason carried a “pompous pretense” with his “Dombey diction.” Mason’s own messmates tended to agree. Andrew P. Butler wrote sarcastically in one letter to David Atchison: “Nothing disturbs the Philosopher Mason—not even dignity.” Even so, Mason was Robert Hunter’s closest friend and political ally. Aside from an occasional gripe, the two men hardly quarreled during the fifteen years in which they lived together in Washington. Their political record likewise speaks to near complete harmony: the two men rarely differed on political measures.²

“Party and Section: The Senate and the Kansas Nebraska Bill,” *Civil War History* 18, no. 4 (Dec. 1972): 293-311; Wolff, *The Kansas-Nebraska Bill: Party, Section, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Revisionist Press, 1977); Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), esp. 401-34; Joan E. Lampton, “The Kansas-Nebraska Act Reconsidered: An Analysis of Men, Methods, and Motives” (Ph.D. diss., Illinois State Univ., 1979); Yonatan Eyal, “With His Eyes Wide Open: Stephen A. Douglas and the Kansas-Nebraska Disaster of 1854,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 91, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 175-217; and Michael F. Holt, *Fate of their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2005), esp. 100-102. An exception is Shelden, *Washington Brotherhood*, esp. 96-119

² For contemporary description of Mason see, Forney, *Anecdotes of Public Men*, 1:57 (the name Dombey refers to Charles Dickens’ serialized novel, *Dombey and Son* of 1848, of which Hunter was an avid reader); Isaac E. Holmes to Andrew P. Butler, March 17, 1856, in *Correspondence of Robert M.T. Hunter*, ed. Charles Henry Ambler (1918, reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 182; Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, [May 1848], quoted in Martha Hunter, *A Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter* (Washington, D.C.: Neale Publishing Co., 1903), 103; Andrew P. Butler to David R. Atchison, March 15, 1856, David Rice Atchison Papers, 1837-1953, folder 5, MOHS; and Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, January 6, 1858; Papers of the Hunter and Garnett families, box 29, UVA. The papers of James Murray Mason are scattered. The primary published collection of letters is offered by his daughter in Virginia Mason, *The Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason, with Some Personal History* (Roanoke, Va.: Stone Printing Manufacturing Co., 1903). Previously held in private collections, several of the letters reproduced by Virginia Mason have been accessioned and incorporated into the Chew Family Papers, HSP. Useful secondary accounts of Mason include James L. Bugg, “The Political Career of James Murray Mason: The Legislative Phase” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Virginia, 1950); Robert W. Young, *Senator James Murray Mason: Defender of the Old South* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1989); and Adam J. Zucconi, “Ideology of Equality: James Murray Mason and Antebellum Politics” (M.A. thesis, Clemson Univ., 2011).

In contrast to the bombastic Mason, contemporaries generally found Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter to be quiet and reserved. While daughter Virginia Mason remembered her father as “unusually cheerfully, buoyant, hopeful,” she described Hunter in comparison as “far more inclined to the quiet, secluded life of the student.” Hunter was full of quiet wisdom: John Forney noticed Hunter’s “quiet and careful conservatism” and later described him as “able, cool, and cautious,” while Isaac Holmes thought Hunter possessed “more wisdom than falls to the Lot of even distinguished Persons.” He was, in the estimation of one Washington newspaper editor, “one of the most indefatigable and business like men here.” Another contemporary, the notably hot-tempered Robert Toombs of Georgia, scoffed at Hunter’s “timidity” on questions of policy. Here again, Hunter’s messmate agreed with the assessment. In a letter to David Atchison, Andrew Butler opined: “Hunter is anxious and ambitious; and is sometimes moody—but he has, now and then, jestful gleams of cheerfulness that is delightful.” Martha Hunter, faithful daughter of the senator, agreed, calling her father “naturally sanguine” and “hospitable, almost to excess.”³

³ For contemporary descriptions of Hunter, see Forney, *Anecdotes of Public Men*, 1:57, 2:217; Isaac E. Holmes to Andrew P. Butler, March 17, 1856, in “Correspondence of Robert M.T. Hunter, 1826-1876,” ed. Charles H. Ambler, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1916* (Washington, D.C., 1918), 182; *Richmond Enquirer*, Jan. 16, 1854; Andrew P. Butler to David R. Atchison, March 15, 1856; David Rice Atchison Papers, Folder 5, MOHS; and Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 77. As compared to Mason, the papers of Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter are somewhat less scattered, deposited primarily at UVA, including the Hunter-Garnett Papers and several subsidiary collections; at VHS, including two important collections the Hunter Family Papers, 1766-1918 (“Old Series” and “New Series,” respectively); and at LV, including the Papers of Robert M.T. Hunter and the Garnett-Mercer-Hunter Family Papers. Also essential are the collected letters of Hunter at UVA, prepared as James L. Anderson and Mary F. Crouch, ed., *Papers of R.M.T. Hunter, 1817-1887* (microfilm, 13 reels, Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1989); and the many useful (and accurate) typescripts of various Hunter and Garnett family papers in the William Garnett Chisolm Papers. Major biographical works include Dice R. Anderson, “Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter,” *John P. Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College* 2 (June 1906): 4-77; Henry H. Simms, *Life of Robert M.T. Hunter: A Study in Sectionalism and Secession* (Richmond, Va.: William Byrd Press, 1935); John E. Fisher, “Statesman of a Lost Cause: R.M.T. Hunter and the Sectional Controversy, 1847-1887” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Virginia, 1968); and Richard Randall Moore, “In Search of a Safe Government: A Biography of R.M.T. Hunter of Virginia” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of South Carolina, 1993). Brief biographical

Together, James Murray Mason and Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter formed the core of the F Street Mess. Of the remaining members, two were notable characters in their own right. Although all the messmates owned varying numbers of slaves, Andrew Pickens Butler was truly a product of elite planters and the enslaved people who enabled them. He possessed the ample girth of the wealthy and sported a high-flowing mane popular among the South Carolina gentry. By the middle 1850s, he suffered from the effects of a paralytic stroke, which caused him to spit uncontrollably while speaking (a feature famously attacked by Charles Sumner). Possessed of a gifted legal mind, Butler had more talent as a jurist than a politician (he was called “Judge” by his companions long after he had left behind the bench). Of the same vintage as Mason, he was equally opinionated. Butler’s judgmental letters to messmate David Atchison demonstrate the comfortable confidence and near effortless exertion of authority that defined the patrician class in the Old South.⁴

Although Andrew P. Butler could at times act outrageously, the most volatile of the messmates was David Rice Atchison, perhaps best known to history by the much disputed title “One Day President of the USA.” A contemporary found that Atchison was “witty, good humored and makes fun for the Senate sometimes and they all like him.” His only biographer soberly depicted him as a man of humble origins, who flourished in the frontier west of Missouri.

sketches may be found in James L. Anderson, “Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter,” *Virginia Cavalcade* 18 (Autumn 1968): 9-13; and John E. Fisher, “The Dilemma of a States’ Rights Whig: The Congressional Career of R.M.T. Hunter, 1837-1841,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 81, no. 4 (Oct. 1973): 387-404.

⁴ By 1850, Andrew Butler owned a thousand acres of land, valued at \$20,000, along with sixty-four enslaved laborers (Robert Hunter eventually surpassed him in total ownership of enslaved persons). For the best contemporary depiction of Butler, see Alfred P. Aldrich, “Memoir of Judge A. P. Butler,” in *South Carolina Bench and Bar*, 2 vols., ed. Ulysses R. Brooks (Columbia, S.C.: State Co., 1908), 1:9-20. No full-length biography of Andrew Pickens Butler has been written. Useful snapshots include F. I. Herriot, “James W. Grimes Versus the Southrons,” *Annals of Iowa* 15, no. 5 (1926), 335; Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father’s House are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1985), esp. 93-94; and Burton, “Butler, Andrew Pickens,” *American National Biography Online* (Feb. 2000), available at <<http://www.anb.org/articles/04/04-00181.html>>.

A more imaginative historian has described Atchison as a man who “cherished whiskey to keep warm—and Old Dave was warmer than most.” He was “tall, florid, coarse...somewhere between imposing and ugly,” while his “personality ranged from swaggering to ferocious.” “Bourbon Dave,” as his constituents often called him, came of age in the shadow of Thomas Hart Benton, but, by the 1850s, he had surpassed the older Missourian as the state’s most powerful politician. In 1853, the colorful Atchison succeeded the more moderate William Rufus King as the President *pro tem* of the Senate. Whatever the personal qualities of David Atchison, he possessed one political quality in greater abundance than all the others combined: ambition.⁵

If the story of Mason and Hunter had ended with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, their role in the creation of the F Street Mess would mark them as among the most important of antebellum senators. However, in the years ahead, Mason and Hunter moved further in the direction of a united southern politics, so that with the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, they came to support secession and pushed Virginia to join the Confederacy. Part of their collective move toward radicalism may be explained by their associations with two later, and much younger, messmates: Muscoe R.H. Garnett of Virginia (Hunter’s nephew) and William P. Miles of South Carolina. In this reconstituted mess arrangement, Mason and Hunter

⁵ For contemporary descriptions of Atchison, see William F. Switzler, *Illustrated History of Missouri: From 1541 to 1877* (St. Louis: C.R. Barns, 1879), 256; William H. Perrin, ed., *History of Bourbon, Scott, Harrison and Nicholas Counties, Kentucky* (Chicago: Baskin, O.L., & Co., 1885), 364-65; and for an interesting retrospective account of an 1882 interview with Atchison, see Walter B. Stevens, “A Day and Night with ‘Old Davy’: David R. Atchison,” *Missouri Historical Review* 31, no. 2 (Jan. 1937): 129-139. The best biography of David R. Atchison remains William E. Parrish, *David Rice Atchison of Missouri, Border Politician* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1961). Also useful are John W. Townsend, “The History of David Rice Atchison, the One Day President of the USA,” *Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society* 8, no. 23 (May, 1910): 39-44; Eda I. Roberts, “The Life of David Rice Atchison as Told by Himself and Contemporaries” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1920); George H. Haynes, “President of the United States for a Single Day,” *American Historical Review* 30, no. 2 (Jan. 1925): 308-10; Theodore Atchison, “David R. Atchison, a Study in American Politics,” *Missouri Historical Review* 24, no. 4 (July 1930), 502-15; and Lampton “The Kansas-Nebraska Act Reconsidered,” 39-60. Memorable descriptions of Atchison may be found in Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 1:545; see also John S. Brickey to John Randall Webber, July 4, 1852, John Compton Brickey Papers, 1816-1973, MHML.

continued to fuse the political with the connections of kinship and friendship. Ironically, their political successes in the cause of southern unity would require the permanent dissolution of the mess in the spring of 1861.⁶

In the many Washington messes that they formed, James M. Mason and Robert M.T. Hunter aimed to create, in the memorable words of one historian, “a little piece of Democratic heaven.” Their mess enabled a congenial easiness, suggestive of those who partook of lives together, and offered a temporary home where political and personal relationships flourished. In their quality as “apart from the ordinary,” the mess created by Mason and Hunter committed to creating a surrogate family in Washington. From this foundation came major political initiatives, most notably the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska organization bill in 1854, and the possibilities for southern unity, and ultimately secession, in the face of Republican Party dominance. The “family” created by Mason and Hunter proved to be a critical vehicle for the sustenance of southern political culture that nurtured not only the cause of slaveholding interests but disunion as well.⁷

The Mason’s Apprentice

When John Adams asked Thomas Jefferson to prepare the document that became known as the Declaration of Independence, he did so with the specific knowledge that the new nation could not exist without the full support of the Old Dominion. The “Virginia dynasty” would go

⁶ About Muscoe R.H. Garnett, see the biographical sketch by his son, James Mercer Garnett, “Biographical Sketch of Muscoe Russell Hunter Garnett (1821-1864), of ‘Elmwood,’ Essex Co., Va.,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 18, no. 1 and 2 (July and Oct. 1909): 17-37, 71-89; and Allyne Garnett Pearce, ed., *You Must Give Something Back: Some Descendants of John Garnett, Gloucester County, Virginia* (Abilene, Tex.: H.V. Chapman & Sons, 2000), esp. 217-35. About the fire-eaters generally, whose numbers included William Porcher Miles, see Walther, *The Fire-Eaters*; and David S. Heidler, *Pulling Down the Temple: The Fire-Eaters and the Destruction of the Union* (Mechanicsburg, Penna.: Stackpole Books, 1994).

⁷ Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 1:550; see also chapter 1, footnote 8.

on to rule early national politics—four of the first five presidents (George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe) and several more besides in the years ahead were Virginians—a fact not unnoticed by jealous northern politicians. By the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, the commonwealth still boasted the largest area (a position it would hold until the introduction of Missouri in 1821) and greatest number of people (bested only by New York in the 1810 Census).⁸

If Virginia stands as the representative sample of mainstream American politics to start the Nineteenth Century, she could likewise claim a distinguished record of political dissent, from Patrick Henry's demand for liberty or death to George Mason's vehement objections to encroaching centralized authority. That someone such as George Mason rejected the powers of a strong central government hardly surprises: his financial interests were in the cash crop of tobacco, and he benefited from fewer regulations by central authorities. During the debates surrounding the new constitution of 1787, Mason also argued for the immediate abolition of the international slave trade, while he simultaneously rebuked the document's explicit lack of protection for the peculiar institution elsewhere. The issue of slavery in the Constitution received twisted logic from even the most logical of rhetoricians.⁹

⁸ Originating in the early part of the Nineteenth Century, the phrase "Virginia Dynasty" was still as current in the early part of the Twentieth Century, as it is today; see, for example, Allen Johnson, *Jefferson and His Colleagues: A Chronicle of the Virginia Dynasty* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1921); and more recently Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Knopf, 1998). About the position of Virginia in the 1820s, see Susan Dunn, *Dominion of Memories: Jefferson, Madison, and the Decline of Virginia* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), esp. 1-14.

⁹ About the family of George Mason IV, and especially his son John Mason, see Pamela C. Copeland and Richard K. MacMaster, *The Five George Masons: Patriots and Planters of Virginia and Maryland* (Charlottesville: Published for the Board of Regents of Gunston Hall by the Univ. Press of Virginia, 1975), 281-82; Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Jeff Broadwater, *George Mason, Forgotten Founder* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006).

Although a man of great public standing, George Mason, the fourth son to be so named, emphasized the importance of family in his private affairs. He built Gunston Hall on a vast six thousand acre estate, along what is today Mason's Neck. With his wife Sarah Brent Mason, Mason fathered eight children, of whom John Mason (born 1766) was son number four of five. In July 1796, the budding businessman John Mason married Anna Maria Murray of Annapolis, described by one contemporary as a "charming woman." In the early 1790s, the young couple moved to a Mason family town home in Georgetown (at 25th and L Streets today), a day's ride from the Mason's main estate in Fairfax. Mr. and Mrs. John Mason also selectively spent time at their family's home on Analostan Island (today's Roosevelt Island) in the middle of the Potomac River, which one visitor described as "rather unhealthy in the fall months" with thick fog in the spring and summer. Into this elite Georgetown family, James Murray Mason, the couple's second child, was born on November 3, 1798. Few politicians of the 1850s could claim so distinguished a heritage.¹⁰

The early years of James Murray Mason were marked by education, both classical and practical. He was a compassionate child, notably desirous to care for an imprisoned British soldier during the War of 1812, and naturally attracted to politics (his father took him to the Senate galleries on numerous occasions). Schooled in Georgetown, Mason might have gone to college there or in nearby Virginia. Instead, he enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania in 1815, perhaps on account of the wartime calamities that had devastated Washington City. In

¹⁰ Copeland, *Five George Masons*, 281-82; letter of Rebecca Lowndes Stoddert, [ca. 1796], quoted in Anne Hollingsworth Wharton, *Social Life in the Early Republic* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1902), 87; James F. Duhamel, "Analostan Island," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 35/36 (1935): 133-145; Willard J. Webb, "John Mason of Analostan Island," *Arlington Historical Magazine* 5, no. 4 (Oct., 1976): 24-25; Mollie Somerville, "General John Mason of Analostan Island" *The Ironworker* 62, no. 2 (Spring, 1963): 3; and Robert Mills, "An Unpublished Diary of Robert Mills, 1803," ed. Hennig Cohen, *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 51 (Oct., 1950): 187-194, here 193-194.

Philadelphia, Mason lived with his mother's relative, Commodore Murray, followed by a stint at a house for speakers of the French language. The young Mason thrived in the collegiate and social environment of the Quaker City. He joined the fledgling Philomathean Society, which had its headquarters in the former President's House at Ninth and Market Streets, and served the organization in the prestigious role of Moderator. Of note, the Moderator who succeeded Mason was the future Attorney-General Henry Gilpin, whom Mason likely defended from impeachment charges levied by the society's members in 1817. Mason completed his bachelor's degree in the requisite three years. For a profession he chose law, returning to Virginia for further studies at the College of William and Mary. One year's apprenticeship in Richmond rounded out his preparation, so that by the summer of 1820, he could establish himself in the provincial town of Winchester in Frederick County, Virginia.¹¹

While a student at the University of Pennsylvania, Mason began a six-year courtship with Elizabeth Margaretta Chew. Born in 1798 to Benjamin Chew and Katherine Banning Chew, Elizabeth (known as Eliza) was the daughter of one of the most affluent families of Philadelphia society, splitting time between their town home on Fourth Street and their estate, Cliveden, located in Germantown, both of which were attended by free and enslaved blacks. Eliza's many siblings (nine in total) included Henry Banning Chew (a founding member of the Philomathean Society at Penn), William White Chew (Mason's classmate and fellow society member) and Anne Sophia Penn Chew, who corresponded frequently with the young Mason. When Mason pursued his legal studies at the College of William and Mary, sister Anne judged that his separation from Eliza was a worthy "test of your powers and must have convinced you, upon how firm a basis your affections were reposed." Mason's affections were indeed strong.

¹¹ Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 10; *A History of the Philomathean Society of the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: privately printed, 1913), 13, 22, 24, 144-147. In the early years of the society, the entire senior class counted itself among its members.

Benjamin Chew, Jr., patriarch of the family, offered Mason the tender embrace of a father, writing in July 1822: “I cannot but meet you...with peculiar sensibility and a tenderness naturally resulting from the contemplated adoption of one whom the future happiness of my child in this life must depend.” In keeping with the tradition of the day, the bridegroom traveled to the home of his betrothed for the wedding. Thus it was on a beautiful summer’s day at Cliveden in July 1822 that a proud Virginian son married a wealthy Pennsylvania daughter.¹²

The young couple moved to rural Winchester, in which place their union produced eight children. Rustic though their early “housekeeping” was, James and Eliza enjoyed a true companionate marriage. To her sister Anne, the new bride blushed that “the enjoyment I receive from my husband’s devoted love far exceeds my most sanguine hopes.” The reluctant purchase of several enslaved blacks allowed for further leisure. Eliza reported happily to Anne how the couple would “practise together,” James on his flute and Eliza on the piano, play chess, and how at night Mason “reads to me, while I sew.” As the Masons fortunes expanded and their lives grew into middle age, their affection for one another did not diminish. Whenever apart, James and Eliza exchanged daily letters (largely destroyed in 1862 when the Union Army occupied Winchester). In 1841, Eliza Mason wrote her husband from Cliveden, where she was staying for an extended period with the children. Her “anxious heart” was soothed by James’s letter, and she reminded her husband “how immediately, and entirely my happiness depends upon your well

¹² James Murray Mason and Eliza Margaretta Chew were distantly related through Eliza’s mother, Katharine Banning Chew, who was a cousin to Anna Murray. John Mason, James’s father, may also have known Benjamin Chew, Jr., through Doctor James Murray of Annapolis (father to John’s wife Anna Murray). See also [Anne Sophia Penn Chew] to James M. Mason, Mar. 6, [1819], and Benjamin Chew, Jr., to James M. Mason, July 9, 1822, in Custis-Lee-Mason Family Papers, box 1, folder 3, LV; and Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 12. On courtship in early nineteenth-century Virginia, see Russell L. Blake, “Ties of Intimacy: Social Values and Personal Relationships of Antebellum Slaveholders” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Michigan, 1978), esp. 80-109; and Melinda S. Buza, “‘Pledges of Our Love’: Friendship, Love, and Marriage among the Virginia Gentry, 1800-1825,” in *The Edge of the South: Life in Nineteenth-Century Virginia*, ed. Edward L. Ayers and John C. Willis (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1991), 9-36.

being—I need not express the many solitudes I have felt, since we parted.” Although surrounded by family, Eliza reported, “I dare not permit myself to think of the distance which divides me from my best and dearest friend, and the recollection of your comfortless solitude.” A neighbor described the couple’s domestic life as “peculiarly beautiful.” Even the laconic Robert Hunter referred to Eliza as Mason’s “lady lover” in one letter to his wife.¹³

During the 1820s, James Mason established himself as a public fixture of Winchester society. In April 1826, his fellow citizens elected him to the House of Delegates in “a very animated contest.” On July 4, he delivered an oration, remembered by a young Henry A. Wise as of the “same ring of metal” characteristic of his illustrious forbearer George Mason. When news arrived of the deaths of founding fathers Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, Mason helped to organize a commemoration of the two men. During his one term in the legislature, Mason stood on strict constitutional grounds, opposing internal improvements funded by the state government. For this stance, the voters did not return him for a second term of office. In 1828, he again sought election to the House of Delegates, this time obtaining the second seat from Frederick County and a spot at the state’s constitutional convention in October. Much as his grandfather had done before him, Mason opposed the proposed state constitution (then, as now,

¹³ Elizabeth Margarettta Chew Mason to Anne Sophia Penn Chew, [1822], quoted in Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 16, 19; Elizabeth Margarettta Chew Mason to Katherine Banning Chew, [1824], quoted in *ibid.*, 18; Elizabeth Margarettta Chew Mason to James M. Mason, [Oct. 2, 1841]; Lee-Custis-Mason Papers, box 1, folder 3, LV; Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, Mar. 10, 1860, Hunter Family Papers (Old Series), box 9, folder 5, VHS. On the destruction of the letters between James and Eliza, see Henry C. Connor, *John Archibald Campbell, Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, 1853-1861* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1920), 264-65; and Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 38.

it narrowly passed anyway). In 1831, he tried for the congressional seat in the twentieth district, only to lose to the incumbent.¹⁴

With his family and law practice growing alike, the Masons made a permanent move from Winchester proper to a house just outside of town, taking possession in 1829. They called their home “Selma.” Eliza Mason was well pleased with their new location, though she did express significant concerns to her sister Anne: “Our house and grounds are very much in want of attention, and of putting to rights,” but “my children are as blessedly well and as merry as my heart can desire.” To her mother, Eliza wrote joyously of being “peculiarly fitted for ruralizing.” From Selma, James Mason participated in numerous statewide political activities, always trying to stay rooted in Winchester. For Mason, home was truly his castle. To his sister-in-law Anne, he confided, “I long to get back again to my own dear home, the only spot on earth where, when one enters, he knows that suspicion, distrust, and jealousy do not attend him.” Daughter Virginia Mason fondly recalled how her father wrote regularly to her, always with the closing line: “Remember that whatever interests you is of interest to me.”¹⁵

The call of public service proved too great a lure, even for such a family man. He was, after all, the grandson of George Mason and ever aware of his place in history. In 1837, Mason returned to politics, this time on the national level. When Edward Lucas—the congressional messmate of James Buchanan and William Rufus King—decided not to seek reelection, the Democracy in Virginia urged Mason to succeed him. In the May election, he defeated the Whig candidate, John B. D. Smith, by a wide margin. Before heading to Washington to take part in

¹⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, April 11, 1826; Henry A. Wise, “Hon. James M. Mason,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 25 (1897): 187-188; Bugg, “Political Career of James Murray Mason,” 55-57; Young, *Senator James Murray Mason*, 9-13.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Margaretta Chew Mason to Katherine Banning Chew [1829]; Elizabeth Margaretta Chew Mason to Anne Sophia Penn Chew, November 1829; and James M. Mason to Anne Sophia Penn Chew [ca. 1840s], quoted in Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 29-31, 36; Bugg, “Political Career of James Murray Mason,” 153-154.

what he called the “grand arena,” Mason consulted with the Washington veteran, William Cabell Rives, acknowledging the “counsels both of the older and better soldier.” With the Panic of 1837 spreading across the nation and his beloved Democratic Party in disarray, the new congressman was going to need every ally possible in the years ahead. An unreformed romantic whose personal life had already inflected many aspects of his politics, from his sense of himself as a defender of George Mason’s legacy to his keen interest in his children’s well being, James Murray Mason also entered Washington in need of the solace provided by family life.¹⁶

The Green Hunter

The early colonial settlement of Virginia was fueled by waves of migrants from the British Isles. The bustling trans-Atlantic economy encouraged such aspirants of material success to migrate to the Chesapeake region, though their actual fortunes were often less than expected. James Hunter, the progenitor of the Hunter family, was one such emigrant to the Tidewater in the later seventeenth century. More than one hundred years later, material impecunity still compelled his great-grandson, also named James Hunter, to take to the sea at an early age to seek better fortunes. By contrast, James Garnett, the founder of the Garnett clan in Virginia, was already well-established financially soon after his emigration to the colonies. For the descendants of James Garnett and his wife Elizabeth Muscoe, the impulse toward high society was almost immediate. The Garnett family alone constructed several grand estates (English in style and built on the back of enslaved Africans), which soon dotted the landscape across the Tidewater. They named their plantation homes after geographic features that surrounded them,

¹⁶ Bugg, “Political Career of James Murray Mason,” 178-188; James M. Mason to William C. Rives, May 18, 1837, William Cabell Rives Papers, box 55, LC.

with titles such as Mount Pleasant, Prospect Hill, Elmwood, Rose Hill, Laytons, and Champlain.¹⁷

By the second century of settlement in Essex County, the Hunter, Garnett, and Mercer families had long been associated, and in many cases, they had intermarried with one another (the Muscoe and Taliaferro families were also related). Consanguinity, the marriage of cousins, was not only common, but often welcomed by elite Virginians. Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter could count several interrelated family members. His own father, James Hunter, the son of William Hunter and Sarah Maria Garnett, married his first cousin Maria Garnett, who was the daughter of Muscoe Garnett and Grace Fenton Mercer. The newlyweds James Hunter and Maria Garnett were not the only pair of first cousins to marry from these esteemed families: James's younger brother, Muscoe Garnett Hunter, married Maria's younger sister, Grace Fenton Garnett. Come what may for the children of these old Virginia families, they could not be said to lack for a strong sense of family.¹⁸

To this third generation of unions among Hunters and Garnetts, Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter was born on April 21, 1809, at Mount Pleasant, the home of his maternal grandfather Muscoe Garnett. He was a favorite child of the family, the eldest of two sons as well as four

¹⁷ On the Hunter and Garnett families, see Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 13-15; Rhys Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1982); Thomas T. Waterman, *The Mansions of Virginia, 1706-1776* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1945). See also the very useful genealogy prepared by the later descendant James Mercer Garnett, *Genealogy of the Mercer-Garnett Family of Essex County, Virginia* (Richmond, Va.: Whittet & Shepperson Printers, 1910); and the detailed five-part article by William Garnett Chisolm, "The Garnetts of Essex County and Their Homes," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 42, no. 1, 2, 3, and 4 (Jan., April, July, and Oct., 1934): 72-83, 166-180, 256-68, 358-66; and 43, no. 1 (Jan., 1935): 69-71. Incidentally, Muscoe Garnett, the child of James Garnett and Elizabeth Muscoe, married Grace Fenton Mercer, herself a daughter of the second marriage of the educated lawyer and Irish immigrant, John Mercer, whose first marriage had been to Catherine Mason, a great-aunt of James Murray Mason.

¹⁸ The next generation of Hunters and Garnetts would continue the tradition of intermarriage (for example, Maria Hunter, daughter of James Hunter and Maria Garnett, would marry first cousin James Mercer Garnett, Jr., son of James Mercer Garnett, Sr., and Mary Eleanor Dick Mercer, who were also first cousins; from this union Muscoe Russell Hunter Garnett was born).

daughters, one by a second marriage. By all accounts, his sisters, Jane Swann, Maria, and Martha Fenton, and his brother, William, enjoyed a pleasant childhood. When the children's mother Maria Garnett Hunter died, James Hunter next married his second cousin, Apphia Bushrod Rouzie, from whom Sarah Harriet Apphia Hunter was born in 1819 (with the unfortunate consequence of Apphia dying in childbirth). When James Hunter himself died in 1825, the orphaned children removed to Elmwood, the ancestral home of the Garnetts. There they fell under the care of James Hunter's sister Martha Taliaferro Hunter, whom the family affectionately called Aunt Patsy, with occasional supervision from their uncle, James Mercer Garnett, Sr.¹⁹

Although he would be destined to spend most of his life away from his childhood home, as a young boy, Robert Hunter familiarized himself with the future expectations of a Virginia gentleman, including the management of the household and its many attendant enslaved persons. His close ties with members of his kinship network also affected his early education: in fact, older sisters Martha and Jane homeschooled the young Robert until he was ten years old. He would find more formal education at the Rose Hill School, about which is father fretted one rainy day: "I am afraid this long spell of bad weather has interfered very much with your attendance at school." James Hunter need not have worried, for his son daily walked with an African American boy named Austin (a companion whom Hunter chose in lieu of utilizing a

¹⁹ Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 17-28. Virginia has never outlawed marriage among first cousins; on consanguinity among elites in nineteenth-century America more generally, see Martin Ottenheimer, *Forbidden Relatives: The American Myth of Cousin Marriage* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1996), esp. 11-41; and for a comparison of its prevalence between North and South, see Billingsley, *Communities of Kinship*, 14.

horse as transportation). To complete his political education, he relied on his uncle, James Mercer Garnett, Sr., who had served as a congressman in the early decade of the new century.²⁰

Hunter's schooling continued with two years at the University of Virginia, beginning at age fifteen in 1826. His impetus in attending the new university may well have stemmed from his childhood friend John Temple, who was among the inaugural class of students in 1825 and who encouraged his younger friend to join him in Charlottesville. While a student, Hunter did not forget his many relatives, writing dozens of letters to his sisters, cousins, aunts, and uncles. In fact, this initial absence was the start of an epistolary relationship that ultimately produced thousands of letters over the course of his lifetime. To his sister Maria, he described his living arrangements at the university: "I live in the most orderly and retired part of the college." An excellent student, possessed of natural talent in the classical languages of Latin and Greek, Hunter began legal coursework after only one year at the university.²¹

After his graduation from the university in 1830, Hunter pursued the study of law under the tutelage of Judge Henry St. George Tucker in Winchester. The two years spent in Winchester were fruitful both personally and politically for the young man. Hunter became acquainted with several "mountain girls," whom he found "certainly more than passable in appearance," as he described them in one letter to his widowed sister Maria Hunter Garnett. At age nineteen, Hunter first noticed Mary Eveline Dandridge, who was the niece of Judge Tucker and then a girl of only eleven years of age. The courtship began in earnest in 1835, when Hunter was elected to the first of three terms in Virginia House of Delegate and Dandridge was a guest

²⁰ Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 29-35; James Hunter to Robert M.T. Hunter, Jan. 22, 1821, Hunter Family Papers (Old Series), Box 7, VHS. See also the six letters dated between 1835 and 1840 from James Mercer Garnett, Sr., to Robert M.T. Hunter in the Garnett-Mercer-Hunter Papers, LV.

²¹ Of these extended family members, Martha Taliaferro Hunter, known as Aunt Patsy, was a surrogate mother of sorts, while James Mercer Garnett, Robert's closest uncle, was a father figure. Robert M.T. Hunter to Maria Hunter Garnett, Mar. 14, 1826, typescript; Chisolm Papers, VHS. For a detailed account of Hunter's time at the University of Virginia, see Moore, "In Search of a Safe Government," 15-21.

of Judge Tucker in Richmond. At first, Hunter did not disclose his intention to marry. When his sister Jane heard of the rumor, she wrote anxiously and opined: “You know I have long wanted another sister, but do let her be a fine one.” In return, Robert described Mary Eveline to his sister Jane as “young, handsome, intelligent, cheerful, agreeable, and good,” while daughter Martha Hunter later recalled her mother’s nickname: “Queen of the Valley.” The young Line (pronounced Lene) had awakened “a capacity for feelings which have never yet been developed or expressed,” he wrote to Jane.²²

New evidence further suggests the depth of feeling between the lovers. Hunter wrote a series of intensely erotic letters to Mary Eveline in the summer of 1836, including one where he begged: “[L]et me open to you my heart of hearts and show you the object of my secret worship as it stands there enshrined in its inmost recesses.” Hunter so loved Mary Eveline that he nearly gave up politics for her. “I am almost ready at times to forswear allegiances to all others except yourself,” he declared in the months before their marriage. Perhaps because of his ardor, Hunter sometimes found his betrothed to be less than attentive with her correspondence. “Trust in my devotion, try it (*if necessary*) with any thing but *indifference*,” he chided Dandridge after a lapse of a month without a single letter from her. Perhaps reflective of the sensitivity which Hunter held for his correspondence, his complaints of “indifference” recurred in future letters long past this period of courtship.²³

The young couple married in October 1836 at Mary’s family home, “The Bower,” in Jefferson County, Virginia. Days after the wedding, Robert wrote to his sister Martha that

²² Robert M.T. Hunter to Maria Hunter Garnett, November 3, [n.d.], and Robert M.T. Hunter to Jane Hunter, [n.d., ca. 1835], quoted in Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 36, 46-47, 49; Jane Swann Hunter to Robert M.T. Hunter, Feb. 17, [1836]; Hunter Family Papers (New Series), Section 13, VHS (see also the transcription of the letter in Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 50 and 54-55).

²³ Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge, July 6, 1836, July 14, 1836 and Aug. 29, [1836]; Hunter Family Papers (New Series), Section 13, VHS.

“Mary Eveline desires her best love to you all and expresses her hope that you will all love her as much as she is prepared to love you.” The couple would live at “Fonthill,” the two-story farmhouse constructed by Hunter in 1832, in the years ahead. The Hunters’ new home was close enough to the Elmwood and Mount Pleasant estates of his relatives to continue the strong family bonds that had characterized his youth. In fact, several of his own children, including Robert M.T. Hunter, Jr., known as “Bob,” and Martha Taliaferro Hunter, known as “Pink,” would be raised in a fashion similar to their father, with close cousins and aunts integral to their early education and upbringing.²⁴

While in Winchester, Hunter also likely met James Mason for the first time, though no record of their initial encounter survives. Certainly, the two men shared foundational principles of the Democratic Party, then the only viable option for political candidates from Virginia. Once back in Essex County, Hunter followed in his father and his uncle’s footsteps, when he took his seat in the Virginia House of Delegates in 1835. Like his uncle James Mercer Garnett, Sr., who had once joined John Randolph of Roanoke to oppose the administration of Thomas Jefferson, Hunter resented the reign of “King Andrew” and labeled himself “anti-administration.” At the same time, a new, fledgling political party, the Whigs, had emerged to benefit from such opposition. Although he did not consider himself a Whig in the same vein as Henry Clay, Hunter’s opponents labeled him as such. In truth, Hunter had deviated enough from the strict principles of constitutional interpretation to warrant such an association. Eventually, he embraced this connection with the Whig Party.²⁵

Hunter’s flirtation with the Whig Party revealed the conflicted nature of local politics in the late 1830s. Classified as a “Sub-Treasury, anti-Clay, States’ Rights Whig,” Hunter could

²⁴ Robert M.T. Hunter to Martha Fenton Hunter, Oct. 9, 1836; Hunter Family Papers (New Series), Section 11, VHS; Moore, “In Search of a Safe Government,” 39-40.

²⁵ Anderson, “Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter,” 7; Moore, “In Search of a Safe Government,” 30-33.

position himself against the mainstream principles of the party (exemplified by perennial candidate Henry Clay), while still holding true to many of the Democratic ideals of his mentor John C. Calhoun. In this way, Hunter mirrored Calhoun's own transition from the national Republican Party of the 1820s to his states' rights ideology, which only incidentally aligned with the Democratic Party when it was convenient to the South Carolinian. By July 1840, Hunter stood in public opposition to both William Henry Harrison and Martin Van Buren, a testament to the complex nature of party politics in Virginia.²⁶

If confusion reigned on the national level, Virginia little doubted the abilities of this son of Essex with the Hunter name. Twice reelected to the Virginia House, Hunter naturally eyed the congressional seat in his district. In 1837, the opportunity came to declare himself a candidate, under the "States' Rights Whig" moniker that his constituents favored. In the election, he defeated Democrat Archibald R. Harwood by a narrow margin. Hunter would hold his seat for three consecutive terms and another one besides. As an oppositional candidate, Hunter originally proposed to hold an independent course; yet, he soon found that he needed political allies. To advance beyond district favorite son, Hunter needed to find younger allies closer, ones whose own principles matched his own. As he entered Congress for the first time in 1837, much remained uncertain for Robert Hunter.²⁷

Living Together As One Family

When James Mason and Robert Hunter took their seats in March 1837, the pressing question of the day was the economy. The new president, Martin Van Buren, proposed to

²⁶ On the Whig Party in Virginia, see Henry H. Simms, *The Rise of the Whigs in Virginia, 1824-1840* (Richmond, Va.: William Byrd Press, 1929), esp. 138, 155-156; see also Fisher, "Dilemma of a States' Right Whig," 387-404.

²⁷ Moore, "In Search of a Safe Government," 45-49.

continue his predecessor's policies, one that favored pet banks and a subtreasury system to address the loss of the national bank. In the Senate, Henry Clay opposed the Democracy at every turn. In the House, the leadership of the Jacksonian party had fallen to the youthful Speaker of the House, James Knox Polk. Into this divided government, Mason and Hunter first attempted to navigate the treacherous shoals of national politics.

As with all new representatives in Washington, the first concern upon arrival was the arrangement of lodgings. How Mason and Hunter came to form a mess together is unclear, but the motivation for the initial mess likely originated with Mason. Daughter Virginia Mason remembered her father's "fondness for domestic life" and distaste for "hotels or club-life," which he found "intolerable." As a new representative, Virginia Mason surmised, her father "adopted a plan and combining with two or three other gentleman, taking a house and living together as one family." As Mason and Hunter understood, boardinghouse life in Washington presented an unusual opportunity for elites to live in close quarters with one another in imitation of their absent families. Just how "living together as one family" would look for Mason and Hunter remained a work in progress for the remainder of their time in Washington.²⁸

In a pattern indicative of its southern brand of politics, their first mess together included mostly representatives south of the Mason Dixon Line, though others joined them in the large house. Besides Mason and Hunter, the mess included John C. and Floride Calhoun, Francis W. and Margaret Pickens, Francis Mallory (a moderate Whig from Virginia), Aaron V. Brown of Tennessee, and one Dr. McKay, among others. The early mess association of Mason and Hunter with the famed senator from South Carolina should not be understated. By 1837, John C. Calhoun was already a legend of American politics, whose long career in Congress spanned more than two decades. In Calhoun, the two new young Virginians found a mentor, though not

²⁸ Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 41.

one without his own faults. Mason perceived that Calhoun possessed a “mind of the very highest order,” but with “a vein of hallucination...[which] renders him worse than useless to the country he seems born to have controlled.” Despite these objections, Mason allied himself with Calhoun from 1837 onward. As one of his most trusted associates, Mason delivered Calhoun’s last senate speech during the compromise debates of 1850. When Calhoun finally passed away at the end of March 1850, Mason was also among those who accompanied the deceased senator’s remains to South Carolina (Hunter, too, wanted to join the escort, but as he wrote to Line, “We cannot both go away together, and Mason of necessity goes to S.C.”).²⁹

Yet of the two, Calhoun influenced Hunter more. In the young Hunter, Calhoun found a willing disciple and competent lieutenant. Over time, Calhoun came to consider Hunter an ideological heir to his states’ rights philosophy. In preparation for a presidential run in 1844, Hunter penned an anonymous biography of Calhoun, which has only subsequently been identified definitively as being a product of Hunter’s hand. The literary effort did neither man much political good, as Hunter was not returned to Congress by his district (losing to Whig Willoughby Newton) and Calhoun failed to secure the party’s nomination (losing out to James

²⁹ In the first, short session of Congress from September to October 1837, Mason and Hunter lived in different messes; see Goldman, ed., *Congressional Directories*, 319-20, 331, 343. On the members of the first mess shared with Hunter, see James M. Mason to Anne Sophia Penn Chew, [n.d., ca. Jan. 1838], *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, ed. Mason, 41; Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter [n.d., ca. 1838], Hunter Family Papers (Old Series), Box 7, VHS, in which Hunter notes: “To add to my hardship Dr. McKay now rooms out of the house so that I have no one to gossip with at home”; James M. Mason to Sophia Anne Penn Chew, Jan. 1, 1839, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, ed. Mason, 46. On Mason’s delivery of Calhoun’s March 4, 1850, speech, see Merrill Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, Calhoun* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 455-61; and for Hunter’s interest in accompanying Calhoun’s funeral procession, Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, April 20, [1850], *Papers of Robert M.T. Hunter*, UVA, reel 3.

K. Polk). A disheartened Calhoun urged “manly & vigorous efforts” by Hunter and others to reclaim the state for the Democracy.³⁰

While Calhoun exerted great influence on the two newest representatives from Virginia, he did not necessarily set the course of their politics. For example, Hunter supported the independent treasury, a measure which Calhoun (and Mason) opposed. Despite his reservations to Van Buren’s economic policies, Calhoun formally returned to the fold of the Democracy in 1837, a move the Whig Hunter would not make for several more years to come. Nevertheless, Calhoun supported Hunter through the congressional election of 1839, writing to the younger man with great interest: “The struggle in Virginia seemed to me to destroy all who would not range themselves under the flag of the administration or the opposition, as mere partisans....” While Calhoun mused on the effect of party affiliation, Hunter continued to set a course as a States’ Rights Whig who sympathized with many of the Democratic Party’s principles.³¹

In contrast to their occasional differences on political measures, Mason and Hunter accorded with one another on the personal level. Daughter Virginia Mason noted a “specially congenial intercourse” between her father and Hunter, despite the “marked contrast between them as regards their temperaments and their personal tastes.” As Virginia Mason well knew, the congeniality stemmed from the pair’s many commonalities: their family’s origins in the Chesapeake, their similar educations and legal training, their shared service in Virginia General

³⁰ On Calhoun, the indispensable biography is still Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1944-1951); for a welcomed update, see Irving H. Bartlett, *John C. Calhoun: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1993). The case for Hunter’s authorship of the biography is made persuasively in James L. Anderson and W. Edwin Hemphill, “The 1843 Biography of John C. Calhoun: Was R. M.T. Hunter Its Author?”, *Journal of Southern History* 38, no. 3 (Aug. 1972): 469-74. John C. Calhoun to Robert M.T. Hunter, May 9, 1843, in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*, 28 vols., ed. Clyde N. Wilson (Columbia: Published by the University of South Carolina Press for the South Caroliniana Society, 1959-2003), 17:171. On Hunter’s involvement in the campaign to elect Calhoun and his defeat in 1843, see Moore, “In Search of a Safe Government,” 110-120.

³¹ John C. Calhoun to Robert M.T. Hunter, June 1839, in *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Wilson, 14:617-18.

Assembly, and finally their serendipitous election to the House of Representatives in 1837. As Mason's daughter correctly surmised, the two future senators belonged to the "same school of thought" with respect to politics and felt "entire confidence in and respect for each other."³²

The early mess life of Mason and Hunter proceeded very pleasantly. As Mason reported to his sister-in-law Anne Sophia Penn Chew in January 1839, the mess was located "remote from the court end of the city." This did not prevent a "very nice little *wedding*" from taking place between Mrs. Calhoun's brother and the sister of Mrs. Pickens. "We had none except the mess present," Mason mused, adding, "And that's the way they *marry* in Washington." Past messmates were not forgotten, either. "Who brews your punch now that I am no longer an honourable?" Francis Mallory joked to his old messmate Hunter. "Does Mr. Speaker heat his water in a shaving can as of yore to fabricate this divine distillation and regale himself with an air bath in a sitting posture by the round table as was the case on a certain occasion which now shall be nameless," he asked in further jest. The concern for quotidian details, such as punch brewing and air baths, further suggests that the camaraderie among messmates could be similar to that shared during the college friendships of earlier years.³³

Even so, mess life at best approximated the feeling of family. For two romantics such as Mason and Hunter, the emotional attachments at home could not be replaced. To Line at Fonthill, Hunter admitted, "I did not know how dependent I was upon you for my happiness until I left house without you." Loneliness was a theme in many of Hunter's letters to Line ("I am sometimes exceedingly lonely," Hunter emphasized in one), as was his great anticipation upon returning home ("My heart almost bounds within me when I think of returning to my dear dear

³² Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 41.

³³ James M. Mason to Sophia Anne Penn Chew, Jan. 1, 1839, [n.d., ca. Jan. 1838], *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, ed. Mason, 47, 41; Francis Mallory to Robert M.T. Hunter, Jan. 18, 1840, quoted in *Correspondence of Robert M.T. Hunter*, ed. Ambler, 32.

Line and to the enjoyments of my home,” Hunter pined in another). As Hunter himself often commented to Line, Mason dearly missed Eliza, too. As Virginia Mason recorded, her father wrote near daily letters to Eliza, a quality he shared with Hunter.³⁴

Since Mason failed to gain reelection, the term of the twenty-fifth Congress was the first and last time Mason and Hunter messed together as representatives. To start the new congressional term, Hunter united with Francis W. Pickens and Robert Barnwell Rhett in what Calhoun dubbed a “temperance mess,” since none of the three men partook of spirituous liquors. Messmate Aaron V. Brown regretted the loss of such “fine fellows,” but Hunter could not have been happier. To Line he happily declared, “[W]e now have an entire southern mess which promises to be very agreeable.” Not long after this letter, Hunter successfully defeated his messmate Francis Pickens for the position of Speaker of the House, garnering the entirety of the Whig vote and a few Democrats besides. Calhoun thought him the “least objectionable” of the several candidates offered, but he had “great confidence in his good sense & discretion.” The youngest man ever to hold the office, Hunter proposed a middle course as Speaker. Many thought him unfit for the office, including Aaron Brown and John Q. Adams, the latter of whom privately sneered that Hunter was “prematurely hoisted into a place for which he is not fit, precisely for his Virginia quiddities.”³⁵

³⁴ Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, Mar. 30, 1839, Hunter Family Papers (Old Series), Box 7, VHS; Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, [1838]; *Papers of Robert M.T. Hunter*, UVA, reel 2; Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, Feb. 8, 1838, Hunter Family Papers (Old Series), Box 7, VHS.

³⁵ John C. Calhoun to Anna Maria Calhoun Clemson, Dec. 18, 1839, in *Papers of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Wilson, 15:20-21; Aaron V. Brown to James K. Polk, Dec. 7, 1839, in *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, ed. Cutler, 5:330; Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, [n.d., ca. Dec. 1839]; Hunter Family Papers (Old Series), Box 8, VHS; Aaron V. Brown to James K. Polk, Feb. 4, 1840, in *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, ed. Cutler, 5:381; Diary, Sunday, Jan. 20, 1840, in *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, ed. Adams, 10:379.

Now a Democrat, Hunter was reelected in 1841 for a third term to the Congress. He happily relinquished the speakership to the Kentucky Whig John White. To start the new session, Hunter once again struggled to find an adequate mess, eventually settling on Hill's with nearly a dozen Virginia men and their wives. Although Line was absent at Fonthill, Hunter hoped to bring her to Washington: "One reason for my choosing my present position is that I expect to be able to make comfortable arrangements for you when you come on." Hunter further lamented that a "great many of the members have their wives with them." Other than an occasional visit, though, Line did not come on. She would never do so during Hunter's time in Congress.³⁶

In 1843, Hunter suffered his first political loss, possibly because he took the election for granted. His nephew Muscoe Russell Hunter Garnett warned his uncle about the dangers of inactivity in the campaign that year, insisting "upon the importance of leaving home at once & *be up & doing*." But after three terms in Congress, Hunter welcomed the chance to return home to Line and his young children. With the death of Uncle James Mercer Garnett, Sr., in 1843, Robert's sister Maria Hunter Garnett decided to remove from Elmwood to Fonthill, a place her son Muscoe R.H. Garnett also called home for the foreseeable future. During this period at Fonthill, another child, James Dandridge, was born, which made three in total. These were happy times for Hunter; however, they were also destined to be fleeting. Of the Hunter children, more would predecease than survive their parents, including one child who died in infancy.³⁷

³⁶ The mess at Hill's included Henry A. Wise, Francis Mallory, William O. Goode (who would later join Hunter again at the mess on F Street), the Virginia Whig Thomas Walker Gilmer, one Mr. Hubbard of Virginia, a couple Mr. and Mrs. Coles, and "Governor Pope and his lady." See Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, Dec. 1841, quoted in Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 95-96.

³⁷ Muscoe Russell Hunter Garnett to Robert M.T. Hunter, [n.d., ca. 1842], Hunter Family Papers (New Series), Box 8, VHS; Moore, "In Search of a Safe Government," 75-98. Garnett, "Genealogy of the Mercer-Garnett Family of Essex County, Virginia," 32; Moore, "In Search of a Safe Government," 124-125. The children of Robert M.T. Hunter and Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter were Robert Mercer

The break from Washington also proved to be an all too brief interlude. The failure of Calhoun's nomination convinced Hunter to return to the House (though he began to aspire towards the Senate around this same time). Much as Polk crushed Clay on the national level, Hunter defeated the incumbent Willoughby in his district's election in 1844. In November 1845, he traveled to the capital for the start of a new session. Although the Democrats once again held power, Hunter found himself at odds with the new president's expansionist policies, first toward Oregon and then Mexico. Deputized to write on his uncle's behalf, Muscoe R.H. Garnett reported that Hunter's Oregon speech "took wonderfully, but the disposition shown to attack all Democrats who do not go the full Oregon figure, annoys him a good deal." Three months later, when the attention was on the southern border, Hunter wrote to Line: "It is almost impossible to prevent a war with Mexico." Following party lines, he nevertheless voted in favor of declaring war against Mexico.³⁸

Then, in January 1847, the General Assembly of Virginia convened and, unknowingly, selected their final pair of men to serve as senators before the Civil War. The former incumbent, the Whig William A. Archer, stood no chance for reelection by the Democratic-controlled legislature. As he had done a decade prior in the contest for Speaker of the House, Hunter emerged as compromise candidate among the Democrats. His past affiliation with the Whigs, interestingly enough, probably garnered him the necessary votes to be selected as Virginia's newest senator, because as Willis Bocock reported "your friends were Calhoun men, and all because whigs were voting for you." The Calhoun men throughout the state rejoiced at the news.

Taliaferro (1839-1861), Martha Taliaferro (1841-1909), James Dandridge (1844-1884), Sarah Stephena (1846-1865), Philip Stephen (1848-1923), Muscoe Russell Garnett (1850-1865), Annie Buchanan (1852), and Mary Eveline (1854-1881).

³⁸ On Hunter's senatorial aspirations, see Robert M.T. Hunter to James A. Seddon, Mar. 17, 1844, Seddon Family Papers, 1831-1882, VHS. Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, May 1846, Hunter Family Papers (Old Series), Box 8, VHS. Moore, "In Search of a Safe Government," 140-150.

“The cause of Patriotism has triumph’d,” the Democrat and son of the ex-president, John Tyler, Jr., cheered from Richmond.³⁹

Robert Hunter would not hold the title of the commonwealth's newest senator for long. James Mason had also been carefully following the events of the new administration. For the past eight years, he had been continuing his legal practice in Winchester, growing his family, serving as a bank president and county prosecutor, and attending to the business affairs of the Chew family in Pennsylvania. Throughout, Mason had stayed a firm supporter of Calhoun, whose withdrawal from the presidential scene in 1844 was also a major setback to Mason's own political aspirations. Although he expressed no interest in returning to public office, neither had he closed the door to the idea.⁴⁰

Then an unexpected turn of events opened such a door for Mason. On January 12, 1847, the Democratic senator Isaac S. Pennypacker of Shenandoah County, died suddenly in Washington. With one senator already chosen, the Virginia Assembly now deliberated for a second time. The informal policy of the Old Dominion had long been to choose one senator each from the eastern and western parts of the state. With Hunter's selection, the eastern half was fulfilled, but with Pennypacker's death, the western spot opened. Aware of his potential candidacy, Mason, who was already in Richmond to appear before the court of appeals, quickly removed himself to his father's estate, Clermont, in Fairfax County. There he hoped, as he later recorded in a memorandum about his life during this period, “to avoid all suspicion or intimation of soliciting the appointment.” Based on his strong Democratic principles, the Assembly chose Mason with over seventy percent of the vote, an affirmation, as one historian has written of, the

³⁹ Willis P. Bocock to Robert M.T. Hunter, Jan. 18, 1847, quoted in *Correspondence of R. M.T. Hunter*, ed. Ambler, 84-86; John Tyler, Jr., to Robert M.T. Hunter, [Jan. 15, 1847], in *ibid.*, 83-84; Moore, “In Search of a Safe Government,” 151-152.

⁴⁰ Young, *Senator James Murray Mason*, 20-25; Bugg, “Political Career of James Murray Mason,” 257-59.

“magic of the Mason name.” Since he was filling a vacancy, Mason headed to Washington immediately, taking his seat on January 25. His old congressional colleague and friend Robert Hunter would join him in that chamber the following December.⁴¹

Although neither man fully understood the implications of the Assembly’s actions, the stage was now set for the revival of an old friendship and the advancement of the pro-slavery, states’ rights agenda that had animated the early part of their political careers. Both Democrats and both disciples of Calhoun, Mason and Hunter would join their former mentor in promoting the sectional agenda of the South Carolinian. Mason was not particularly optimistic about his role ahead. To his longtime associate, William C. Rives, himself a former senator and soon to succeed William Rufus King as Minister to France, he wrote, “I do not know that either of us can do more than keep an eye on the credit and character of our dear old Commonwealth.” What the protector of Old Virginia did not know was that the chance for strategic offensive lay right around the corner of F Street.⁴²

Judge Butler and the C Street Mess

By chance, then, both Mason and Hunter were again selected to represent Virginia in the Congress. Much had changed in the ten years since the duo of Virginians had first come to Washington. “Manifest Destiny” characterized the age. So, too, had the great figures of the earlier period passed from the scene. Andrew Jackson had finally succumbed to old age in 1845, leaving his beloved Democratic Party in the hands of Polk and his partisans. The great giants of the Senate (Clay, Webster, and Calhoun) were aging, though one final moment on the national

⁴¹ Richmond *Enquirer*, Jan. 21, 22, 25, and 29, 1847; Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 48-52; Young, *Senator James Murray Mason*, 24; Bugg, “Political Career of James Murray Mason,” 263-72. See also James H. Carson to Joseph Long, Feb. 5, 1847, Joseph Long Papers, box 1, DUL.

⁴² James M. Mason to William C. Rives, Feb. 1, 1847, Rives Papers, box 76, LC.

stage remained them. With the new martial spirit of the times, aged heroes would emerge to lead both parties (Taylor for the Whigs, and Cass for the Democrats). Then in 1846, the anti-slavery Pennsylvania congressman David Wilmot introduced a rider to an appropriations bill that forbade the presence of slavery in any territory acquired from the war with Mexico. The House erupted in debate, with Southerners standing in unison against the “Wilmot Proviso.” Whether the newly acquired western territories would permit slavery was now the most important political question of the day.

Although much had changed politically since James M. Mason and Robert M.T. Hunter last shared living quarters in 1839, the warmth of their former friendship had not diminished. As daughter Virginia Mason recalled, they “renewed the intimacy that continued without interruption.” By the later 1840s, however, the small mess favored by Mason and Hunter no longer enjoyed widespread prevalence. Although hotels afforded far less intimacy than did the private mess, southern congressmen tended in greater numbers toward them, particularly Brown’s Hotel. In describing his lodgings, the Alabama senator Clement Claiborne Clay, Jr., remarked: “We are about as comfortable as we could be made in a Hotel,” though he felt there was “much more real comfort” in smaller boardinghouses.⁴³

Andrew Pickens Butler was one such new southern senator who likely headed first to Brown’s upon his arrival in Washington in December 1846. Born in 1796 to Behethland Foote Moore and William Butler, the Revolutionary War General, Andrew P. Butler carried the elite provenance of his Edgefield, South Carolina, birthright. He first attended Moses Waddel’s school, followed by South Carolina College, where he graduated in 1817. He next studied for and was admitted to the bar in the following year. Butler practiced law first in Columbia and

⁴³ Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 52; Clement C. Clay, Jr., to Clement C. Clay, Sr., Dec. 11, 1858, Clement Claiborne Clay Papers, box 3, DUL.

later in his native Edgefield. As a son of one of South Carolina's most famous families, Andrew Butler was proud of his family's history and assiduously conducted genealogical research in his spare time. In January 1828, Butler wrote to his kinsman William Butler Harrison about his grandfather's Revolutionary War record and ended on a personal note: "I am the only one of my family that remains single- and it is time for a man at 30 to be looking out for a wife." Butler must have successfully "looked out," for in December 1829, he married the nineteen-year-old Susan Ann Simkins. Their marriage was tragically cut short by a protracted illness that claimed Susan's life on May 22, 1830. Butler next married Rebecca Harriet Hayne, with whom he had one child, Eloise Brevard Butler, born in June 1834 (incidentally, in November 1856, daughter Eloise married Johnson Hagood, the future Confederate General and victor of the Battle of Fort Wagner). Tragically, Rebecca Hayne Butler died shortly after the birth of Eloise. Twice widowed, Butler never again married. He instead turned his energies toward his work on the South Carolina bench.⁴⁴

In 1824, Butler was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives, where he was remembered for his "impulsive and explosive" personality. Later, he served in the South Carolina Senate. During the crisis over Nullification, Butler reportedly "poured forth such a torrent of indignant eloquence as had never heard before or since." Throughout his political career, Butler remained a staunch ally of John C. Calhoun, who aided his fortunes for public office. In 1833, he was appointed a judge to fill the vacancy left by the resignation of George

⁴⁴ Butler had lost several older brothers in the preceding years. Andrew P. Butler to William Butler Harrison, Jan. 20, 1828, Andrew Pickens Butler Papers, SCL; Audrey Pool, "Butler Family Wills, Edgefield and Saluda Counties, SC," available <<http://www.africanaheritage.com/uploads/916/ButlerFamilyWillsSC.txt>>; Theodore D. Jervey, "The Hayne Family," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 5, no. 3 (1904): 188; "Johnson Hagood," in *Biographical Directory of the Governors of the United States, 1789-1978*, 4 vols., ed. Robert Sobel and John Raimo (Westport, Conn.: Meckler Books, 1978) 4:1421; Johnson Hagood, *Memoirs of the War of Secession*, 2 vols., ed. U. R. Brooks (Columbia, S.C.: State Co., 1910).

McDuffie (the same man who had once so impressed James Buchanan as a young congressman).⁴⁵

The explosive personality of the new senator quickly caused a stir with the other volatile members of the body. In August 1848, Butler nearly engaged in an affair of honor with Thomas Hart Benton (this despite many earlier attempts of his own to mediate his kinsman Preston Brooks's dueling habits). The dispute centered on a copy of a treaty then being discussed in committee. When Butler overtly challenged Benton in a speech before the Senate, the proud Missourian roared in reply: "There is a lie in his throat. I will cram it down or choke it." The two men nearly came to blows, but for the rush of other senators in between them. In response, Butler issued the challenge through the aegis of Senator Henry Foote of Mississippi, but the bombastic Benton did not condescend to reply. Despite these scuffles, Butler still generally favored the Cooperationist camp of South Carolina politics in the years prior to 1850.⁴⁶

Although impulsive and socially high-minded, Mason and Hunter found another congenial fellow and Democratic senatorial newcomer in the widower Judge Butler. Perhaps they had known him through their association with John C. Calhoun, who had attended the same preparatory school as Butler, or Francis W. Pickens, who was a first cousin to Butler. At once, the trio initiated cordial social relations with members of Washington society. After dining at their mess, Vice-President George M. Dallas thought the men were "keeping house together very snugly." In the following year, they formed a mess under the care of one Mr. Havenner on C

⁴⁵ Aldrich, "Memoir of Judge A. P. Butler," 11-20.

⁴⁶ On Butler's clash with Benton, see Aldrich, "Memoir of A.P. Butler," 18; John Wentworth, *Congressional Reminiscences: Adams, Benton, Calhoun, Clay, and Webster* (Chicago: Fergus, 1882), 49; Elbert B. Smith, *Magnificent Missourian: The Life of Thomas Hart Benton* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1957), esp. 237-38; and Richard L. Miller, *Lincoln and His World: The Path to the Presidency, 1854-1860*, 4 vols. (Mechanicsburg, Penna.: Stackpole Books; Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006-2012) 4:140. On Butler's participation in Cooperationist camp of South Carolina politics, see Rollin G. Osterweiss, *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1949), esp. 133 and 146.

Street, located conveniently near the Capitol and other important federal buildings. At three members, they were the largest such group of senators to mess together in the capital. In the next term, the trio of Mason, Hunter, and Butler was nevertheless ready to expand their clique to include more Southerners.⁴⁷

All three supporters of Calhoun, the messmates on C Street shared the same pro-slavery, states' rights views. As Virginia Mason later recalled, Butler got along very well with both Mason and Hunter: "These three gentleman belonged to the same school of thought and feeling on all political questions of interest to the South; and a warm personal friendship was soon established between them, a friendship that grew warmer and stronger as years rolled by, and continued to the close of their respective lives." Certainly, Butler agreed with Hunter and Mason about the need for a unified political action in the South. During the debates of 1850, Butler complained to Franklin Elmore, "Some of our own men *lapse* on party feeling, catering the presidential election which, after all, will be nothing but a prize fight for offices, and the money of the Treasury."⁴⁸

In addition to their political similarities, the "warm personal friendship" described by Virginia Mason included a number of trials and tribulations that bonded the men together. After making a call to another "large mess," Hunter reported that the boarders were "very much amused" at a story that Judge Butler had told them about a dinner jointly given by Mason and

⁴⁷ George Mifflin Dallas to Sophia Chew Nicklin Dallas, June 21, 1848; George Mifflin Dallas Papers, box 13, folder 21, HSP (see also a partial transcript in "The Library: The Mystery of the Dallas Papers, I," ed. Roy F. Nichols, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 73, no. 3 (July 1949), 391). Only two groups of senators still lived together in private messes (all Southerners and slave-holders): David Atchison and Solomon Downs, both at Mrs. Duvall's on Missouri Avenue, and Whig senator George Badger of North Carolina with Democrat Pierre Soulé of Louisiana at a "private" residence on Missouri Avenue. See also *City Directory of Washington, D.C., 1850*; *Congressional Directory 1852*.

⁴⁸ Burton, "Butler, Andrew Pickens," *ANB Online*; John B. Edmunds, "Pickens, Francis Wilkinson," *American National Biography Online* (Feb. 2000), available <<http://www.anb.org/articles/04/04-00786.html>>. Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 51-52; Andrew P. Butler to Franklin H. Elmore, April 17, 1850, Franklin Harper Elmore Papers, folder 1, SHC.

Hunter to two visitors, Mr. Rives [probably Judge Alexander Rives] and a Mr. Lyons. “On that day we had changed our cook to save money, and such a dinner!” Hunter recalled. The dinner “became the jest of the town,” with no person more greatly impacted than the proud Mason: “[Y]ou should have seen Mason’s countenance as it passed off,” Hunter wrote to Line. “The dessert consisted of one plate of hard, red apples, which Butler said was the ‘lonest dish’ that ever he saw upon the table.” Although the mess “retrieved the character of our mess’s cuisine” in a subsequent dinner, Hunter mused that Butler “insists that the first dinner was most pleasant.”⁴⁹

Social occasions further cemented the bonds of friendship between the men and helped to bring a homelike atmosphere to the mess. In 1848, Hunter described an “adventure” in which the messmates, joined by John Mason, visited the wife and daughter of the Mexican Minister. As the minister’s wife did not speak enough English to “make conversation practicable,” Hunter reported it was “the first time I ever saw James Mason confused. [John Mason] said he was ‘pompous silence’ personified.” In May 1854, Mason created “quite a stir,” Hunter wrote to Line, when he had “undertaken to give a ‘lunch’ at our house to Lord Elgin and suite, the English and French Ministers and the Cabinet.” Hunter was characteristically pessimistic about its chances of success: “I rather think it will not go off very well, but I do not care much about it. I will help him out as well as I can.” The playful tone suggests a long history between the two men, echoing the congeniality remembered by Virginia Mason years later.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, Feb. 11, 1848, quoted in Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 100.

⁵⁰ Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, July 5, 1850, quoted in Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 104. The John Mason referenced is probably John Young Mason, given his knowledge of Spanish (he was Secretary of the Navy during the Mexican-American War). There is an error with the chronology of the dating, given Robert Hunter’s remark that he “just returned from a visit to Mr. Calhoun,” who was dead by July 1850. The letter was more likely written before April 1850, given Hunter’s further remark that “we could have illy spared him [Calhoun] at this time.” Calhoun, who

For Mason and Hunter both, the mess functioned as a surrogate for the family they had left behind in Virginia. Now with Judge Butler in the house, they organized the mess to promote the spirit of camaraderie, while effectively managing the concerns of the household. Virginia Mason described the mess as “organized in all respects as for a family home.” Each messmate alternated “the office of *housekeeper*, and for a month gave all necessary orders, and kept account of all expenses, which were divided equally between them.” Of course, the role of housekeeper differed significantly from the difficult drudge work that kept the mess functioning. As slave-holding senators, much of the domestic work of the mess was either performed by enslaved people owned by the messmates, or by laborers contracted through the boardinghouse arrangement. The housekeeper role nevertheless took upon responsibilities that may have resonated with the same duties performed by their wives back home.⁵¹

Even with a surrogate family established at the mess, the family members at home were constantly on the messmates’ minds. “I could undertake it all if you were with me,” Hunter wrote Line in one letter, “but as it is I feel that I am wasting and throwing away opportunities of happiness in this too long separation.” The messmates occasionally visited one another’s families on weekend trips, too. On one such visit to Mason’s Winchester home, Butler accompanied his messmate. The widower was said to have remarked: “I have lived for years in the same house with Mason, and have been so intimately associated with him in many ways, that I really thought I knew him thoroughly, but I find I never fully appreciated the man until I saw

gave his famous speech against the compromise on March 4, died on March 31, 1850. Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, [n.d.], quoted in Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 101. Since Lord Elgin arrived in Washington on May 26, 1854, the letter may be dated around that time; see Charles C. Tansill, *The Canadian Reciprocity Treaty of 1854* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1922), 75-76.

⁵¹ Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 52. On southern women’s work in the antebellum period, Cynthia Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1998).

him in his own house among his neighbors, his children, grandchildren, and servants.” Perhaps only when Mason was fully in his domestic element, as master of his own home complete with “servants” did Butler see him for the man he was, but Butler’s comment underscores the temporary nature of being “intimately associated” in the mess. While the men were indeed close for the time they spent together, the mess was only a surrogate for the family, not the real thing.⁵²

Visits from family members often temporarily disrupted life in the mess. When Eliza Mason and the children visited Washington in early February 1848, Hunter described the effect to Line: “Mrs. Mason is in town, and Mason has left us for a few days, to be with her at Colonel Cooper’s, his brother-in-law.” Such visits were necessarily rare. As Virginia Mason reasoned: “There were many considerations, in addition to those connected with the expense involved, that influenced both Mr. and Mrs. Mason in their decision not to bring their children to Washington, but to keep them, while young, in the quiet retirement and the pure country air of their home at Selma.” Nevertheless, Mason and Hunter often had cause to involve themselves in the personal affairs of their respective families. When Robert M.T. Hunter, Jr., went to study at the University of Virginia, the senior Hunter relied on Mason, a member of the Board of Visitors, to watch over his son. “Mason has just returned from the University,” Hunter wrote his wife, “and says he left Bob a little sick....”⁵³

By 1851, the small mess now lodged at Stratton’s on the south side of E Street between Ninth and Tenth. The debates of the previous year over the territorial organization bills, now known as the Compromise of 1850, had proven the importance as never before of southern

⁵² Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, [n.d., ca. 1851-1857], quoted in Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 99; Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 52.

⁵³ Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, Feb. 11, 1848, quoted in Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 100; Mason, *Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason*, 42; Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, Feb. 28, 1858, and Mar. 13, 1858, Hunter-Garnett Papers, box 29, UVA.

unity on the slavery question. Although a convention at Nashville in June 1850 had failed to produce any tangible results, a convention of the Southern Rights Association met in May 1851 in Charleston. At the convention, Judge Butler poured forth a tirade against the Union and urged South Carolina to consider secession (though with the rest of the South in tow, if possible). For the upcoming session of Congress in December 1851, the newly emboldened disunionist once again joined his Virginia colleagues for another term.⁵⁴

Thus it was in May 1852 that Hunter wrote to Line about plans for a new mess for the upcoming session. “Judge Butler has returned,” he wrote, “and we have determined to move out to the suburbs of the town, to Mr. Havenner’s, which is almost in the country.” Although the quarters were “said to be delightful” and the men would be “quite alone,” perhaps more attractive still was the inclusion of a new messmate, David Atchison, into their boardinghouse. In their association with Butler and later Atchison, Mason and Hunter had expanded the definition of their political family to include not only their fellow Virginians but the South more generally. In so doing, whether or not they realized it, they were heading down the path toward an aggressive expansion of slavery in the western territories.⁵⁵

Bourbon Dave and the F Street Mess

The possibilities for secession were still largely theoretical in 1852. For the most part, secession was an ideology limited to a handful of outspoken extremists in South Carolina. The Whigs were savoring their first taste of political power in a decade, while the Democracy fully

⁵⁴ See the “Speech of Hon. A. P. Butler,” (Charleston, S.C., Steam Power-Press of Walker and James, 1851): “The South united, could make one of the best Governments on earth; a Government that could be guided by statesmen and supported by a gallant courage that would adorn the annals and history of any people” (15). Although a supporter of disunion with the federal government, Butler was considered moderate by his state’s standards.

⁵⁵ Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, May 1852, quoted in Hunter, *Memoir of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 105.

expected to retake the presidency in the fall election. Repeating their strategy of 1844, the Democrats chose the dark horse Franklin Pierce and the southern moderate William Rufus King as their standard-bearers. In their last showing as a national party, the Whigs opposed the cross-sectional ticket with another Mexican War hero, Winfield Scott. The victory for Pierce was also a victory for Young America, a wing of the Democracy that variously counted Pierce, Stephen A. Douglas, and even James Buchanan among its members. For now, the truce of 1850 still held the nation together. Whether the new generation of leaders could continue to effect national harmony remained to be seen.⁵⁶

As the congressional session of late 1852 approached, three of the four key players of the F Street mess (Mason, Hunter, and Butler) were in place. Joining the three Southerners was David Rice Atchison, a child of the West and a fervent Democrat. Born in the bluegrass country of Kentucky in 1807, Atchison was a product of his western upbringing. Like his future messmates, he obtained formal schooling at an early age. Atchison first attended the preparatory school of Transylvania University in nearby Lexington, followed by enrollment at the university's prestigious four-year program in 1821. While a student at Transylvania, he formed friendships that lasted him through his political career, including with Jefferson Davis who remembered Atchison as "a tall country boy, true-hearted, and honest." The strength of their friendship in those college days remained fixed in Davis's memory: "I loved him when we were boys, and he grew with growing years in all the graces of manhood." Atchison also formed close friendships with several other future senators, including Solomon W. Downs of Louisiana, George W. Jones of Iowa, Edward A. Hannegan of Indiana, and Jesse D. Bright also of Indiana. After studying for the bar, he practiced law for some time in Carlisle in Nicholas County,

⁵⁶ On the influence of Young America in the 1850s, see Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-1861* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), esp. 202-28.

Kentucky. His legal obligations did not prevent him helping to organize the town's first Thespian society (a talented actor, Atchison may have played the female parts). But like his classmates, Atchison was not much longer for Kentucky: he set out for Missouri in early 1830.⁵⁷

At that time, Missouri was still the frontier of the American empire, with trading posts along the Missouri and Kansas Rivers forming the centers of white population. In this protean political environment, Atchison rose quickly to power. In 1837, he began the first of two terms representing Clay County in the Missouri state legislature. During his time in the legislature, Atchison took it upon himself to welcome Joseph Smith and his religious followers to Missouri. When tensions with the new settlers led to violence, however, Atchison organized the state militia in the so-called "Mormon War." He successfully policed the northwestern counties of the states, with the result that the Mormons were forced into exodus westward. An acknowledged leader of men, Atchison next rode the judicial circuit as one of the state's first traveling judges. When the incumbent U.S. senator Lewis Linn died suddenly in October 1843, Governor Thomas Reynolds chose Atchison to fill the vacancy, who at age thirty-six was among the youngest member of that body.⁵⁸

As a public figure, Atchison was somewhat of a contradiction in terms. On the one hand, Atchison was a noted firebrand and corresponded widely with the leading lights of the states' rights Democrats, including Jefferson Davis, to whom he described himself as "a politician of the *Nullification, Secession, and High Treason* School to which I belong." In his elected capacity, Atchison largely avoided making great speeches. Tennessee Governor Aaron V. Brown noted this tendency and encouraged his fellow Democrat to do "more of the *debating*, however much you may dislike the modern plan of *puffing & swelling* in the way of *speechification*." This lack

⁵⁷ Parrish, *David Rice Atchison*, 1-5; Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 1:25-26; Perrin, ed., *History of Bourbon, Scott, Harrison and Nicholas Counties, Kentucky*, 364-65.

⁵⁸ Parrish, *David Rice Atchison*, 17-31; Switzler, *Illustrated History of Missouri*, 256.

of “puffing” did not extend to political struggles, as Atchison had never backed down from a challenge in his life. When Thomas Hart Benton broke from the strictly southern political agenda, Atchison successfully worked to strip him of his seat in the Senate.⁵⁹

On the personal level, David Atchison was equally puzzling. A self-made man from the borderlands of the West, Atchison brought to Washington the rough edges of the frontier and the interests of westward expansion for slave-owning farmers. A contemporary remembered him as “the soul of honor, a fine conversationalist, and possessed a great memory...plain, jovial and simple in tastes.” Certainly, Atchison partook of alcohol, including one memorable incident where he traveled forty miles by horseback to refill a jug of whiskey. A lifelong bachelor, Atchison was also a man of “convivial and fine social habits.” In his bachelor status, Atchison shared many similarities with William Rufus King, the man he eventually succeeded as President pro tem of the Senate. Unlike King, however, Atchison’s “imposing presence” at well over six feet and his masculine bravado never permitted the same kinds of detractors as did King’s more effeminate presentation.⁶⁰

Once in Washington, Atchison sought political allies to realize his vision for expanding slavery into the western territories neighboring Missouri. As a man who already enjoyed the conviviality of male friendships, Atchison also realized that a mess offered the possibility for both warm fellowship and political success. With the help of senior colleague Thomas Hart Benton, Atchison took up with James M. Hughes, another freshman representative from Missouri, at Masi’s boardinghouse. When the boardinghouse life proved too isolating, Atchison

⁵⁹ David R. Atchison to Jefferson Davis, May 29, 1853, Samuel Treat Papers, MHML; Aaron V. Brown to David R. Atchison, March 1, 1846, Atchison Papers, folder 1, MOHS.

⁶⁰ William E. Parrish, “Atchison, David Rice,” *American National Biography Online* (Feb. 2000), available at <<http://www.anb.org/articles/04/04-00041.html>>; Stevens, “A Day and Night with ‘Old Davy,’” 130, 135; Perrin, ed., *History of Bourbon, Scott, Harrison and Nicholas Counties, Kentucky*, 405; William F. Switzler quoted in William R. Jackson, *Missouri Democracy: A History of the Party and Its Representative Members, Past and Present*, 3 vols. (Chicago: S.J. Clarke, 1935), 1:131.

decided to lodge at Brown's Hotel for the second session in December 1844. From Brown's, Atchison next went to Coleman's Hotel, followed by a stint with new Pennsylvania senator Simon Cameron (who had replaced James Buchanan in that office) at Miss Harrington's boardinghouse starting in December 1847. In 1848, the mess moved to Boyd's boardinghouse and grew to include two former Transylvania University classmates, Hannegan of Indiana and Downs of Louisiana. However, Hannegan was not reelected, and the elderly Downs was serving his final term as senator. By 1852, Atchison sought the companionship of other southern Democrats who shared his steadfast commitment to states' rights and the expansion of slavery.⁶¹

As had been the case with the earlier trio of Mason, Hunter, and Butler, the newly formed quartet moved around quite a bit. In December 1852, they went from Stratton's to Birth's at the east side of Third Street, between Pennsylvania Avenue and C Street. The mess now included a fifth member, William F. DeSaussure of South Carolina, who had recently been appointed to the Senate to fill the unexpired term of Robert Barnwell Rhett. With the addition of DeSaussure, the group included both sets of senators from Virginia (Mason and Hunter) and South Carolina (Butler and DeSaussure), an unprecedented occurrence in political history to that time. Some two years after his time at the mess, De Saussure wrote to Atchison: "I thought I should have an opportunity this winter to return to Washington and spend a week with the Mess. I do not know anything that could have given me greater pleasure. For short as our intercourse was, it has left enduring marks upon my memory & affections." That the South Carolinian desired to spend a week with his former messmates during Washington's relatively cold winter, ostensibly for

⁶¹ For records of their mess arrangements, see *Congressional Directory*, 28th-33rd Congresses; Asbury Dickens to Willie P. Mangum, Jan. 13, 1849, in *Papers of Willie Person Mangum*, ed. Shanks, 5:134-135. On Edward Hannegan, see the unpublished biography, Richard E. Banta, "Rake's Progress: The Story of Edward Allen Hannegan" (Crawfordsville, Ind., n.d.), David Demaree Banta Collection, Franklin College Archives; and on Solomon Downs, see the six-part article by James K. Greer, "Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 12-13 (July and Oct. 1929, Jan., April, July, and Oct. 1930): 381-425, 555-610, 67-116, 257-303, 444-83, 617-54.

pleasure, demonstrates the powerful “affections” that could be created in a Washington boardinghouse.⁶²

At the start of the new session in December 1853, the core group of Mason, Hunter, Butler, and Atchison replaced William DeSaussure with the Virginia Democrat William O. Goode. A representative of Tidewater Virginia, Goode held relatively moderate political views in comparison to his messmates. As a delegate to the Virginia Assembly in 1832, he had given a speech in favor of gradual abolition of slavery. By the 1850s, when such views were no longer current, Goode committed himself to the institution’s continuance and, quite naturally given his association with his messmates, supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. Married and widowed twice, Goode came to Washington without wife or children. Here again, he fit the profile of his messmates, a group that now included two married men with wives at home, two widows, and one bachelor.⁶³

The five men decided to rent a house at 361 F Street, between Ninth and Tenth Streets. Made of brick and “almost within the shadow of the Patent Office,” the building was three doors west of Ninth Street. City maps from the period show an assortment of nearby civic buildings. Directly across the street on the north side was St. Patrick’s Roman Catholic Church. Nearby, along Tenth Street, was the First Baptist Church, while the Methodist Church was on Ninth. Social clubs also proliferated nearby: the Masonic Temple and the Oddfellow’s Club were both in the neighborhood, as were the Temperance Hall and Orphan’s Asylum. While not as close to

⁶² *Congressional Directory*, 32nd Congress, 1st session, 23; *Congressional Directory*, 32nd Congress, 1st session, revised, 23; William F. DeSaussure to David R. Atchison, Jan. 21, 1855, Atchison Papers, folder 5, MOHS.

⁶³ On William Osborne Goode, see *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*; George B. Goode, *Virginia Cousins: A Study of the Ancestry and Posterity of John Goode of Whitby* (Richmond, Va.: J. W. Randolph & English, 1887), 123-124; “The Speech of William O. Goode: On the Abolition of Slavery: Delivered in the House of Delgates [*sic*] of Virginia, on Tuesday, January 24, 1832”; “Speech of Wm. O. Goode, of Virginia” (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1854); and the various articles in the Shelton H. Short, III, Papers, CWM.

Capitol Hill as the mess at C Street, the location at F Street more than compensated, with its easy access to the civic heart of the city.⁶⁴

With the new mess arrangement, Mason continued to promote “living as one family.” Again, the men took turns in the role of “housekeeper.” However, as before, domestic life in the F Street Mess would not have functioned without the labor of a variety of African American laborers. In one memorable letter from Judge Butler to Atchison, he described the arrangement, listing four individuals: “Aunt Betty smokes her pipe; Isaac is almost as dignified as his principal. Bill sleeps late in the morning, the other servant you don’t know.” From the evidence, it is difficult to know if Betty, Bill, and the other unnamed “servant” were enslaved or free (Isaac was Hunter’s longtime personal “servant,” whom one historian memorably described as “liveried Isaac, strutting like Massa”), but most likely they were enslaved. Given the sentimental tone employed by Butler and familiar images of the domestic laborers, the household laborers clearly occupied a unique position in the hierarchy of African Americans. As such, they demanded concessions from their masters that enslaved field laborers could not; for example, Bill could sleep “late in the morning.” Similarly, the appellation “Aunt” to Betty’s name marks her with the language of a family member. Beyond this favored status, the evidence also supports the view that political elites might decide upon mess arrangements based on the advice, and even consent, of their servants. For example, one move of the mess was prompted by difficulty in what Judge Butler called the “kitchen cabinet.” In a letter to Atchison, he complained, “Our

⁶⁴ *Congressional Directory*, 33rd Congress, 1st session, 52, 55. On the physical characteristics of the mess, see Simms, *Life of Robert M.T. Hunter*, 75; the quote is from Nichols, *Franklin Pierce*, 303. Today, the Courtyard by Marriott Washington Convention Center occupies the space where the mess once stood.

cook and chambermaid refuse to forego the attractions of city life, but Isaac carries things with a high hand, and as he is intent upon the removal, I think we shall accomplish it.”⁶⁵

As members of the same political household, the messmates became quite close to one another. The widower Judge Butler and the bachelor Bourbon Dave seem to have developed a particularly intimate friendship. After Atchison’s term as senator had expired, Butler wrote a poem in honor of his departed messmate, which he aptly titled the “Atchisoniad.” In a follow-up letter, Butler mused: “I suppose, by this time, you have read my *Atchisoniad*, in which certain gentleman...called *Atch*, has something more than Roman vestments...The Gratu has given him the knowledge of Harvard, the Courage of Caesar, and the patriotism of Hector.” Well versed in the classical education of the period, Atchison would have understood the reference to the *Iliad*. He would have further appreciated Judge Butler’s description of his own Kansas speech as “*pro Milone*,” a reference to a famous speech of Cicero from the first century B.C. Butler continued the analogy, likening the U.S. Senate of the 1850s to the civil wars of the Roman republic: “We expect in the Senate of an internecine character; Heleneas [*sic*] will be the battle Scene.” Signing the letter “Your Friend,” Butler signaled his wish to continue their friendship beyond the walls of the mess. In a letter to Judge Butler from 1856, fellow South Carolina Democrat Isaac Holmes correctly assessed: “Atchison must be missed by *you*, but he is well employed at home.”⁶⁶

Indeed, the floor of the Senate had become the site of internecine debates over the organization of the Nebraska territory. On the southern side of the question were the members of

⁶⁵ Andrew P. Butler to David R. Atchison, Mar. 15, 1856, Atchison Papers, folder 5, MOHS; Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 1:550.

⁶⁶ Butler to Atchison, March 15, 1856, in *ibid.*; on the figure of Milo, see J.S. Ruebel, “The Trial of Milo in 52 B.C.: A Chronological Study,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Association* 109 (1979): 231-49; Isaac E. Holmes to Andrew P. Butler, Mar. 17, 1856, quoted in *Correspondence of Robert M.T. Hunter*, ed. Ambler, 182. Curiously, this letter became part of the Hunter Papers at UVA, a suggestion that Hunter read it and kept it among his own papers.

the mess, with speeches given by Hunter, Mason, and Butler. The opposition found a voice in the antislavery senator, Charles Sumner, who for the first time employed *ad hominem* attacks in his rhetorical efforts. Nevertheless, the outcome of the bill in the Democratically controlled Senate was clear, with President Pierce making it a test of loyalty to the administration. By February, Atchison was already boasting to his close political friends about the successful course of the territorial bills: “We have the *Niggers* upon all their *sable glory*,” he roared in one letter to Willie P. Mangum of North Carolina. By May, the bill had become law, proving Atchison to be largely correct in his assessment. “In the passage of the Nebraska-Kansas bill,” Robert Hunter later wrote to George Booker, “the South gained the first & only victory on the negro question which is to be found in our legislative history.”⁶⁷

For all his boasting, there is little doubt of David Atchison’s importance in the introduction of the territorial bill. Even among those historians who feel the credit for the bill’s conception goes to Stephen A. Douglas, Atchison has been widely acknowledged as a moving force for the bill’s actual introduction. But few historians have recognized the many personal connections that Atchison shared with the key players of the drama of January 1854. In addition to his association with the F Street Mess, Atchison was an intimate friend of Stephen Douglas. A contemporary described Douglas and Atchison as “inseparable friends.” Indeed, they were both western Democrats who exemplified the tenets of an aggressive, martial manhood, often accompanied by the consumption of alcohol. In the antebellum Senate, few were more colorful

⁶⁷ Atchison further added: “Write to me anything or nothing, a line from you will be to me, like the music of a harp touched by the hand of a Lord of the days of old.” David R. Atchison to Willie P. Mangum, Feb., 8, 1854, Willie Person Mangum Papers, DUL (see also transcription in *Papers of Willie Person Mangum*, ed. Shanks, 5:284); Robert M.T. Hunter to George Booker, May 14, 1856, George Booker Papers, DUL. For a general account of the floor debate in the House and Senate, see Wolff, *Kansas-Nebraska Bill*, 47-86, 148-182.

or better liked by their colleagues. No surprise, then, that Douglas gave Atchison the extra seat in his carriage.⁶⁸

The bachelor Atchison also counted Jefferson Davis as another close friend. Atchison and Davis had been on the most intimate of terms during their time together at Transylvania University. Once reunited in Washington, the two men would have naturally resumed their friendship, which Davis scholars have considered to be “lifelong” in nature. As we have seen, only through Davis’s personal influence with President Pierce was the Sunday meeting permitted to take place. In the years ahead, Atchison continued to correspond with Davis, including one notably prescient report of the developing situation in the Kansas territory: “We will before six months rolls round, have the Devil to play in Kansas and this State, we are organizing, to meet their Organization we will be compelled, to shoot, burn & hang, but the thing will be soon over, we intend to ‘Mormonise’ the Abolitionists.” Given that Atchison was a leader of the border ruffians, his views would have mattered a great deal in the eyes of Secretary of War Davis, and by extension, to those of President Pierce as well.⁶⁹

Of course, there is much irony in the bachelor Atchison having played a role in the introduction of the territories organization bill. In one of his final letters, fellow bachelor William Rufus King, who incidentally was Jefferson Davis’s messmate during a previous

⁶⁸ See for example, Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 407-08, 413-15: “The role of these Senators in determining the form of the Nebraska bill has often been exaggerated. Their importance lay principally in developing a strategy for the measure’s passage” (407). This statement is partially contradicted by a letter from Joseph Robinson to John H. George, (Tues.) Jan. 24, 1854, John Hatch George Papers [M 1926 – 003], box 3, folder 11, NHHS: “We were interrupted by Messrs. Douglas and Atchison. Who have come to consult upon the Nebraska Bill.” On the importance of male friendship and bachelorhood in antebellum politics, especially as it relates to the “subordinate masculinity” of Douglas, see Martin H. Quitt, *Stephen A. Douglas and the Antebellum Democracy* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), 75-86. For a contemporary view of the friendship of Douglas and Atchison, see *The Missouri Republican*, Jan. 13, 1854.

⁶⁹ For the editors’ view of the friendship between Davis and Atchison as “lifelong,” see Crist et al, ed., *Papers of Jefferson Davis*, 4:125n3; and David R. Atchison to Jefferson Davis, Sept. 25, 1854, *Papers of Jefferson Davis*, ed. Crist et al, 5:83-85.

congressional session, wrote to Atchison with a cordial offer of assistance: “Be assured my Dear Sir, there is no man to whom it would afford me greater pleasure to render a service than to yourself.” Distant from the president and without any influence over his decisions, the sickly King could only express the hope that Pierce “may disregard all the attempt that may be made by factions of our party to influence or control his actions.” He would have been dismayed to see the influence of one faction of states’ rights Democrats, centered at F Street and moved by Atchison, do precisely what he had hoped would not happen: introduce a divisive territorial organization bill and pressure President Pierce to support it. But the era of moderate politics, of which had been among the greatest of southern champions, had passed. The years ahead would bear the bitter fruits of the outright disunionist David R. Atchison and his intimate friends Stephen Douglas and Jefferson Davis.⁷⁰

In the wake of the introduction of the territorial organization bills, antislavery politicians pointed their fingers squarely on the interconnections among the members of the F Street Mess. For example, Francis Preston Blair, Jr., son of the famous editor, decried that the messmates had enacted a political conspiracy: “Mr. Calhoun’s Southern unit contrived to get Mr. Atchison made President *pro tem.* of the Senate.” With Atchison now in the mess, Blair declared, “he became the tool of the Nullifiers, and when Mr. Calhoun died, he left the swaggering and sometimes staggering President *pro tem.* to the care of Messrs. Mason, Hunter and Butler, who were his factotums at the close of his life, and may be considered the executors of his estate of

⁷⁰ William R. King to David R. Atchison, Feb. 20, 1853, Atchison Papers, folder 3, MOHS. Ironically, given his later role in the meeting with Pierce, only a year earlier Robert M.T. Hunter had found the general to be “willing to be informed but not influenced” on important political questions; see Robert M.T. Hunter to Henry A. Wise, Jan. 12, 1853, Henry A. Wise Papers, DUL. Jefferson Davis and William Rufus King lived at Mrs. Duval’s for the year 1848-1849. Davis once said in a public speech to have “had abundant opportunities to know Col. King intimately well”; see *Congressional Directory* (1849); and also Davis, “Speech at Jackson,” June 9, 1852, in *Papers of Jefferson Davis*, ed. Crist et al, 4:258-74, here 266.

Nullification.” Two years later, Blair again railed against the “squad of nullifiers” and especially Atchison, “*who really originated the law.*” Blair was not alone in these views: John Parker Hale, William Seward, and Charles Sumner all publicly singled out the messmates for their role in the territorial bills’ introduction. Even President Pierce’s secretary of state, William Marcy of New York, disapprovingly noted the connection of Mason and Hunter to Atchison and deplored the “clannish” nature of the group.⁷¹

Neither did the claims of conspiracy subside in the years after the Civil War. In 1880, John A. Parker of Virginia wrote a blistering review of the members of the mess, arguing that the “originators of the plan fixed upon were Mr. Atchison and three other able and distinguished Southern Senators....” Parker thought the bill to have been conceived “with Atchison and the club of Nullifiers who chamber with him...by means of a caucus or nightly convention held by them with Northern Democrats brought over by the lust of plunder and the temptation of getting the vote of the South as a unit in the next Presidential convention.” While Parker’s analysis of the motivation for the passage of the territorial organization bill may be disputed, his description of the mess as a “club” who “chamber” together was quite accurate.⁷²

The accounts of Blair and Parker raise an important question. Why did the two Virginians, Mason and Hunter, support Atchison’s ambitions to push through the territorial bill?

⁷¹ For various speeches of Francis P. Blair, Jr., on the territorial bills, see the anonymously authored pamphlet, *A Statement of Facts and a Few Suggestions in Review of Political Action in Missouri* (1856), 103-108; see also Francis P. Blair, Jr., *Missouri Democrat*, Mar. 1, 1856; and “Speech of Hon. Francis P. Blair, Jr., of Missouri, on the Kansas Question; Delivered in the House of Representatives, March 23, 1858” (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1858). See also William L. Marcy to Heman J. Redfield, Dec. 13, 1853, William L. Marcy Papers, volume 45, LC.

⁷² The original article appeared as John A. Parker, *National Quarterly Review* 8, no. 13 (July 1880): 105-118; the article was subsequently printed in pamphlet form, with an introduction from Waldorf H. Phillips, as Parker, *The Missing Link: What Led to the War, or the Secret History of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill* (Washington, D.C.: Gray & Clarkson Printers, 1886). Parker continued his attacks on members of the mess in later publications; see Parker, “How James Buchanan Was Made President, and by Whom: The Kansas-Nebraska Bill,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 13, no. 1 (July 1905): 81-87. See also the discussion of Parker in Ray, *Repeal of the Missouri Compromise*, 230.

An answer may be found in the nature of mess life itself. Congressmen chose their living arrangement in ways that were politically strategic. Compared to their northern colleagues, Southerners were more likely to form bonds along the lines of culture and class, whether in the mess or at a hotel. In so doing they overcame implicitly the petty divisions that defined political life and committed to a common strategy that superseded regional and local proclivities. The charged culture of the 1850s was one in which sectional loyalties slowly began to trump political ones on every level. At the core of the F Street mess was a political motivation to achieve larger sectional aims: the extension and protection of slavery in the territories and at home. To achieve this end, Southerners recognized that they would need to control the Congress, the judiciary, and the executive. At least for the Congress, the F Street mess put into practice the very principles that enabled Southern politicians to control critical decisions in Washington until 1860 (to the Democratic Party, for the most part, fell the execution of this strategy on the presidential level). In this way, the later Republican critics of the mess can be seen as ruining the success of the “club,” for they accomplished more effectively their political aims than the peers across the party and sectional divide.

If the mess was a political strategy, the men who composed it also shared close personal relationships bordering on family. Indeed, a careful study of the Kansas-Nebraska Act ultimately concluded that “sectional and personal motives” more than “party considerations” best explain the involvement of the F Street messmates in the introduction of the bill to Congress. With family relations came also an attention to questions of honor. For Mason and Hunter, the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act signaled to the nation that the extension of slavery into the territories was likewise issue fundamental to southern honor. As the scions of the Old Dominion, they well knew that honor started in the home, at the level of proper relations among

householders. As a surrogate family, the members of the mess committed also to one another's honor: when one member of the mess's honor was at stake, so was all the other members'. The motivation to honor one's family may very well have pushed otherwise cautious men to more extreme ends. While these "personal considerations" are difficult to quantify and even harder to prove definitively, impressions from contemporaries bear out the point.⁷³

Perhaps Atchison influenced his messmates, but did he persuade his messmates to follow him on the dangerous course of sectional disharmony? Here the answer is trickier. Of the messmates, Judge Butler needed little swaying to support the expansion of slavery to the West; he had been committed to the cause of disunion since at least the 1830s. But did Mason and Hunter truly believe in the wisdom of the territorial organization bill? Certainly, the Virginians supported the measure publicly, but as to their private thoughts, the record is fairly silent. Perhaps in this organization of the territories, they saw a more permanent solution than the stalemate of four years earlier, as Mason hoped for in his speech on the measure. Perhaps, too, the government could return to the more important economic questions of the tariff, an issue Hunter preferred. In the end, their commitment to the idea of the mess meant, at times, the necessary subordination of their private doubts for the greater cause of southern unity. For Mason and Hunter, the mess reflected the aspirations of its members for southern unity more broadly: the strength of the "club" mirrored their longstanding commitment to the South as a whole. Although their roles in the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Act would be among the

⁷³ The case for "personal motives" is made by Wolff, *The Kansas-Nebraska Bill*, 166, 178; on the role of honor among southern elites, see esp. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*.

most important of their senatorial careers, it would not be the last time that Mason and Hunter extended their political commitments to their fellow messmates.⁷⁴

The Youngsters of the Household

The consequences of the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act would only begin to be felt over the next several years. An “anti-Nebraska” party formed in near spontaneous protest, a precursor to the Republican Party. In the fall congressional elections, these new Republicans polled strongly. With the rise of the new came the fall of the old: the Whig Party had run its course and functioned no more. In time, the remnants of the Whig Party moved in different directions, some toward the nativism of the American Party (the so-called “Know Nothings”) and others to the anti-slavery tenets of the Republicans. Others still forever more refused to be called anything but “Old Line” Whigs. More practically, the territories west of the Missouri River could now legally be organized. With the floodgates open to settlement, the plains of Kansas would become the site of a decade-long conflict for control in the West. Historians later recognized the violence in “Bloody Kansas” as the opening salvos of civil war. By the election of 1856, in which Democrat, Republican, and American Party candidates battled for supremacy, the nation truly stood on the brink of disunion.⁷⁵

Times were changing for the messmates at 361 F Street, too. After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the significance of the mess, to say nothing of the political careers of its

⁷⁴ James M. Mason, comments in the U.S. Senate, Mar. 2, 1854, *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., appendix, 298-99; Russell, “Congressional Issues in the Kansas-Nebraska Bill,” 208-209; Robert M.T. Hunter, comments in the U.S. Senate, Feb. 24, 1854, in *ibid.*, 221-28.

⁷⁵ On the birth of the Republican Party, see Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party*; on “Bleeding Kansas,” see Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2004). On the nature of politics in late antebellum Virginia, see Daniel Crofts, “Late Antebellum Virginia Reconsidered,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 107, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 253-86.

members, began to wane. By 1855, David Atchison had returned to Missouri for good. He would soon play a leading role in the pro-slavery settlement of Kansas (he had already boasted in a September 1854 speech to his constituents that he alone was responsible for the introduction of the territorial organization bill). With Atchison's departure, the messmates sold the accumulated household effects and dispensed the profits equally. The remaining group of Mason, Hunter, Butler, and Goode continued to live together through the next meeting of the Congress. By the time Congress met in late 1856, the mess looked as if it would operate without a fifth member.⁷⁶

The significance of the F Street Mess might have ended there, had it not been for the addition of a new and much younger messmate: Muscoe Russell Hunter Garnett. The nephew of Robert Hunter, Muscoe Garnett came of age with the same expectations of genteel mastery that had been the custom of his family for three generations or more. As a youth, he was educated at a school run by his family members, most notably his grandfather James Mercer Garnett. Extremely close with his many cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, Muscoe Garnett only reluctantly left his family's Elmwood estate for Charlottesville to begin his study at the University of Virginia. Like his uncle Robert, Muscoe wrote hundreds of letters during his time as a student, including dozens to his mother Maria. After completing the collegiate track, he moved to legal studies; after passing the bar, he served in the Virginia legislature, always with an eye for the national stage. He was a true representative of his Hunter and Garnett namesakes.⁷⁷

Much as his uncle Robert had fell under the sway of Calhoun, Muscoe Garnett was perhaps even more taken by the old firebrand. "His boundless enthusiasm is wonderful, and to me very attractive," Garnett wrote of Calhoun in 1841. Robert Hunter enlisted Garnett to campaign for Calhoun in Virginia, an assignment the young Garnett eagerly accepted. From

⁷⁶ Andrew P. Butler to David R. Atchison, April 15, 1855, Atchison Papers, folder 5, MOHS.

⁷⁷ About the literary environment at Elmwood, see Harry Clemons, *The Home Library of the Garnetts of "Elmwood"* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1957).

afar, Garnett had long encouraged his uncle to take a more sectional stance in his politics. In 1850, he wrote Hunter in the wake of the compromise speeches in the Senate: “Whatever mischief has been done here is chiefly due to Clay’s speech...& the extravagant praise of Webster’s speech.” He further urged his uncle to make a speech on the topic, which Hunter did on March 25. When Hunter considered a presidential run in 1856, Garnett once again urged his uncle to consider his fellow Southerners, writing “let me beg you to exert yourself to be attentive & agreeable to the Virginia members & politicians who come your way this winter.” A staunch Democrat himself and already a political confidant of James M. Mason, Garnett won election to his uncle’s former congressional seat in the spring of 1856. Once in Washington, he quickly became a political maverick. In his middle thirties and unmarried, Garnett turned to his uncle’s mess not only for lodging, but also for an introduction to the city’s social life.⁷⁸

Thus it was by the end of 1856 that the famous mess of states’ rights Democrats had expanded to include Virginia’s newest rising star. As before, the political orientation of the group brought them into contact with radical elements of the South. On February 17, 1857, the members of the reconstituted mess hosted Edmund Ruffin, an agriculturist and later fire-eater, for dinner. Ruffin and Hunter had known each other more than twenty years earlier, so when the two men met again, they quickly renewed their acquaintanceship. In his diary, Ruffin recorded the occasion as follows: “Went to dine, on invitation of Mr. Hunter, with his ‘mess,’ which consists of himself, Senator Mason of Va., Senator Butler of S.Ca., & Messrs. Goode & Garnett,

⁷⁸ Muscoe R.H. Garnett to Maria Hunter Garnett, March 18, 1840, typescript, Chisolm Papers, VHS; Muscoe R.H. Garnett to Robert M.T. Hunter, Mar. 19, 1850, and Dec. 9, 1855, in *Papers of Robert M.T. Hunter*, UVA, reels 3-4; James M. Mason to Muscoe R.H. Garnett, July 3, 1855, Hunter-Garnett Papers, 1806-1889 (Mss 38-45-c), UVA. On Garnett’s political career as a “maverick,” see Johanna N. Shields, *The Line of Duty: Maverick Congressmen and the Development of American Political Culture, 1836-1860* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1987); and for a view of him as a southern extremist, see William A. Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003), esp. 140-142

members of the H. of R. from Va.” The men mostly talked of political matters over a “very pleasant sitting of several hours.” All agreed that the upcoming term of the new president James Buchanan would “bring to him but little of either pleasure or honor.” In January 1858, Ruffin returned once more to the mess, where he again “dined by invitation with Senator Hunter & his colleague Mason...” Through hosting guests like Ruffin, the southern clique continued to stay apprised of South Carolina’s efforts to bring about disunion from the federal system.⁷⁹

Although the new mess appeared to be strong, the arrangement did not even last a year. Andrew P. Butler was not a healthy man. When traveling back to Washington in early 1857, Butler caught pneumonia, a condition from which he never truly recovered. To raise spirits, the messmates held a dinner in his honor in January. Although his spirits were raised, Judge Butler died that May at his home in Edgefield, South Carolina. By late 1857, the mess was in complete disarray. To make matters worse, the old problems of disagreeable quarters continued to plague the messmates, to the point where their association together neared dissolution. To Line, Hunter complained that his room was “uncomfortable,” though “cheaper,” which was “some recommendation.” Mason was worse off still. “Mason leaves the mess today and I can hardly blame him for his quarters were uncomfortable,” Hunter reported to Line, adding, “I only wish he was in a different room.” As Mason was the key decision-maker in the household, Hunter brooded about his future quarters: “Mason promises that we shall all be comfortable very soon,” adding in a mood of frustration, “it is useless to talk about what is so disagreeable.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Diary, February 17, 1857, and Jan. 23, 1858, in *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, 2 vols., ed. William K. Scarborough (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1972-1989), 1:37, 150. Ruffin would go on to fire the opening shot of the Civil War, when he lit a fuse to the cannon that fired on Fort Sumter.

⁸⁰ Muscoe R.H. Garnett to Maria Hunter Garnett, Jan. 14, [1857], typescript, Chisolm Papers, VHS; Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, Dec. 12, 1857, and Jan. 6, 1858, Hunter-Garnett Papers, boxes 28-29, UVA.

Even if the quarters had been agreeable, something of the earlier magic of living together had been lost. At various times, Hunter considered quitting the mess altogether and arranging for private quarters with other members of his family, including Muscoe Garnett. In January 1857, Garnett wrote his mother about his uncle's idea: "Uncle Robert says we must make some plan to keep house together; he'll bring Sister Line and Pink, and we can live pleasantly, at least, for three or four months of the session." Homesickness probably compelled the move ("How much I wish I could be at home today," Hunter wrote to Line in a representative letter from 1858). Nevertheless, Mason persisted in continuing to live as one family. "Mason talks of keeping house, and I have not yet found time to look for rooms," Garnett told his mother.⁸¹

The conditions had become "really intolerable," so much so that Muscoe Garnett could not continue to suffer the situation. The occasion of Garnett's departure caused him great sadness; yet, he had not necessarily come to love his new messmates, especially Mason, whom he found "very selfish." "In choosing quarters," Garnett wrote his mother, "he thought of nobody but himself." In another letter, Garnett reiterated his opinion of his messmate: "Mason's obstinacy made the old mess absolutely untenable for me, and when you get here, you will see for yourself how hard it is to get comfortable quarters at a smaller price, or even as small." Again, as he had with Hunter, Mason would not easily let go of Garnett. In early 1858, with the men now living apart, Mason persisted in calling upon the younger Virginian: "Yesterday Mason

⁸¹ Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, Jan. 6, 1858, Hunter-Garnett Papers, box 29, UVA; Muscoe R.H. Garnett to Maria Hunter Garnett, Jan. 4, 1857, Dec. 6, 1858, typescript, Chisolm Papers, VHS; Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, Jan. 10, 1858, Hunter-Garnett Papers, box 29, UVA.

came over here to complain of his lonesome dinners, and ask me to join him that evening...I went down and had a pleasant tete a tete gossip with him.”⁸²

Garnett’s departure from the mess also carried significant political implications. Although Garnett had been thinking of leaving for months, Hunter first reported on his nephew’s desire to leave the mess in a letter to Line in January 1858: “By the way Muscoe talks of quitting our mess to move to a more fashionable part of the city. But Mason resists vehemently.” Hunter did not worry so much about his nephew social life as he did about the move’s effect on his politics. He surmised that “[Garnett] is ultra enough now and if he gets into a So Ca mess he may go too far.” Indeed, Garnett was beginning to associate himself with the most radical members of the Congress, including the South Carolina fire-eater Laurence M. Keitt. Ambitious and eager to build a southern political alliance, Keitt had written to James Henry Hammond, who had been chosen as Judge Butler’s replacement in the Senate, about joining a mess composed of three South Carolina congressmen—Keitt, William Porcher Miles, and Milledge Luke Bonham—and Garnett. “My object, outside of my congratulations,” Keitt began, “is to inquire about your arrangements for the season, Miles, Bonham, Garnett of Va., and myself have formed a mess, and taken a House.” The house, Keitt noted, was “kept by Sally Smith of cuisine celebrity.” “The Rooms are good,” he added and then further remarked, “and you can select which ones you please, when you reach here, if the arrangement suits you.”⁸³

⁸² Muscoe R.H. Garnett to Maria Hunter Garnett, Oct. 16, 1857, typescript, Chisolm Papers, VHS; Muscoe R.H. Garnett to Maria Hunter Garnett, Jan. 6, 1858, Mar. 19 and 20, 1858, typescript, Chisolm Papers, VHS.

⁸³ Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, [Dec. 10, 1857], Hunter-Garnett Papers, box 28, UVA; Laurence M. Keitt to William H. Hammond, Dec. 18, 1857, James Henry Hammond Papers, 1774-1875, box 21, LC. On Hammond’s political views during this period, see Jon L. Wakelyn, “The Changing Loyalties of James Henry Hammond: A Reconsideration,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 75, no. 1 (Jan. 1974): 1-13. About Hammond more generally, see Carol Bleser, ed., *The Hammonds of Redcliffe* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981); Drew G. Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1982); and Carol Bleser, ed.

Hammond never accepted the overture to “take a house,” but he joined Keitt, Miles, and Bonham in taking rooms at the mostly southern Brown’s Hotel. Much to the dismay of his mother, Garnett left Uncle Robert’s mess and joined the southern clique for a session. Of all the men in the group, Garnett seemed to connect most closely with Miles, an erstwhile professor of mathematics turned mayor of Charleston, and eventually the congressman from that district. A fellow bachelor and participant in Washington social life, Miles had become a close companion of Garnett’s. In late 1858, Garnett reported to his mother: “Mason, Uncle Robert, and I take a small furnished house at \$30 a month each, and [Hunter’s enslaved person] Isaac reappears as *major-domo*.” But the new boardinghouse required an additional member: “In order to bring the rent within our resolves of economy, we had to take a fourth messmate, and chose Miles.” Realizing his mother’s distaste for Miles, Garnett added: “Don’t be horrified; he is better this winter I think.”⁸⁴

For a time, the group of Mason, Hunter, Garnett, and Miles enjoyed one another’s companionship. “Our mess all assembled to dinner on Saturday, each dropped naturally into his old room and his old ways and so the winter has begun,” Muscoe Garnett recorded in a letter to his mother from December 1859. Mason regularly insisted that Miles join him for a visit to his Chew family relatives in Philadelphia or to his own home at Selma. Hunter, too, had taken a

Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern Slaveholder (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988).

⁸⁴ No record of Hammond’s reply survives. In the following Congressional session, Hammond resided at the Gunnell house, while Keitt lodged at the Lafayette Hotel. Bonham, meanwhile, stayed throughout at the Brown’s Hotel. *Boyd’s Washington and Georgetown Directory* (Washington, 1858), 378-83; *Boyd’s Washington and Georgetown Directory* (Washington, 1860), 230-32. While his countrymen Preston Brooks and Laurence Keitt had headed upcountry for their education, Miles had joined a number of future South Carolina notables flocked to the College of Charleston, which had recently opened its doors to all white men who could pay the necessary tuition. J.D.B. De Bow, later a well known writer and editor, attended classes with William Porcher Miles, the future mayor of that city and a U.S. Congressman, and William Henry Trescott, a future diplomat and an assistant Secretary of State under Buchanan John F. Kvach, “J.D.B. De Bow’s South Carolina: The Antebellum Origins of the New South Creed,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 113, no. 1 (Jan. 2012): 4-23, esp. 13-14. Muscoe R.H. Garnett to Maria Hunter Garnett, Dec. 8 and 11, 1858, typescript, Chisolm Papers, VHS.

liking to the young South Carolinian, seeing in him something of himself as a youth. In time, Hunter predicted, Miles would one day operate a “pleasant home” and make his future wife “a happy woman.” To Mary B. Chesnut during the war, Hunter had recounted the happy years he had spent with Miles and Garnett: “We lived in the same house four years in Washington. Bachelor’s quarters,” Hunter reportedly said. Chesnut added that Hunter had “never known Miles do an inconsiderate; an impolite, or a selfish thing,” which was ““Pretty high praise—for after all we were only a parcel of old men’—Garnett and himself the youngsters of the household.”⁸⁵

All together in a new mess at 424 H Street, Mason, Hunter, and the “youngsters of the household,” were suddenly a political force with which to be reckoned. Of interest, they, much like James Buchanan and William Rufus King had before them, relied upon the arrangement of a “bachelor’s quarters” to constitution their bloc. But unlike the cross-sectional union of the Bachelor’s mess, intrigue of a more insurrectionary kind was the order of the day. In a moment of youthful ambition combined with a fertile imagination, Miles had hatched a daring plot to overthrow the federal government. The plot came about in December 1859, when the Republican John Sherman of Ohio was a serious contender for the Speaker of the House. Not willing to accept this outcome, Miles proposed an extra-judicial approach to South Carolina Governor William H. Gist. What if South Carolina prepared a fighting force to invade the capital? In reply, Gist promised two regiments of soldiers in Washington, if Miles and his

⁸⁵ Muscoe R.H. Garnett to Maria Hunter Garnett, Dec. 5, 1859, typescript, Chisolm Papers, VHS; James M. Mason to William P. Miles, Apr. 3, 1859, July 15, 1860, and Sept. 5, 1861, William Porcher Miles Papers, boxes 2-3, SHC. Mary Chesnut continued her observation: “Mr. Miles then informed me that a man’s wife had nothing to do with his bachelor scrapes. But for the faith and loyalty due other women, he would not scruple to tell her all of his past life, for it was not her affair at all. Deluded wretch. Jealousy of the past is most women’s hell. It is one of the hopeless irritations, the pest of married life.” Diary entry for September 1863 in *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), 449.

associates decided to “eject” Sherman from the speakership, but he further warned that any serious conflict “should begin in sudden heat & with good provocation, rather than a deliberate determination to perform an act of violence which might prejudice us in the eyes of the world.”⁸⁶

In the next phase of the plan, Governor Gist turned to political operative Christopher G. Memminger to enlist the support of Virginia’s new governor John Letcher. Memminger headed to Richmond in January, where Miles reported that his messmates Mason and Hunter were “anxious to visit Richmond when you arrive and have a personal conference with you.” The hesitation on the part of Virginia greatly disturbed Miles. In a candid letter to Memminger, the bachelor Miles likened the situation to sexual intercourse and procreation: “If you can only urge our Carolina view in such a manner as to imbue Virginia with it, (and at present she is in the best condition to be impregnated ~~with it~~), we may soon hope to see the first of your addresses in the sturdy and healthy offspring of whose birth we could be so justly proud—a Southern confederacy. This would indeed be a worthy heir of the joint glories of the two commonwealths to spring from the loins of the Palmetto State!” A month later, without any success in moving Virginia in the direction of a southern confederacy, Miles posed the urgent question of “what *can* or *ought* we to do *here in Washington* in our Representative capacity, by which we can get *before* the people or at least *up to them*.”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Boyd’s* (1858), 378-83; *Boyd’s* (1860), 230-32. The surviving correspondence is in one direction; see William H. Gist to William P. Miles, Dec. 20, 1859, William Porcher Miles Papers, SHC. For an overview of the speakership crisis, see Ollinger Crenshaw, “The Speakership Crisis of 1859-1860: John Sherman’s Election a Cause of Disruption?”, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 29, no. 3 (Dec. 1942): 323-38; and of Miles’s reaction to the dispute, see Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 2:257-61.

⁸⁷ William P. Miles to Christopher G. Memminger, Jan. 10, 1860, and Feb. 3, 1860, and William H. Gist to Memminger, Jan. 30, 1860, Christopher G. Memminger Papers, folder 2, SHC. On Memminger, see Henry D. Capers, *The Life and Times of C. G. Memminger* (Richmond, Va.: Everett Waddey Co. Publishers, 1893); on Memminger’s aims in visiting Virginia, see Ollinger Crenshaw, “Christopher G. Memminger’s Mission to Virginia, 1860,” *Journal of Southern History* 8, no. 3 (Aug., 1942): 334-49; and Link, *Roots of Secession*, 195-199.

The South Carolina trio of Miles, Memminger, and Gist concluded that they needed to convince Virginia, still the most important of southern states, to support secession from the United States. Whether Mason, Hunter, or Garnett knew of the plot is uncertain, but former governor Henry Wise would not support a preemptive strike on Washington (despite issuing what Muscoe Garnett called “ridiculous exaggerations” in public comments after the execution of John Brown). Miles criticized Wise’s timidity, noting that his “birthing, or abortion rather we might say, is *still born*.” Miles should not have been surprised. While Wise had warned in 1856 that to “submit to the election of a Black Republican, under circumstances like these, is to tell me that Virginia and the fourteen slave States are already subjugated and degraded,” he was not yet ready to commit overt treason. Moreover, Wise had long been a supporter of Buchanan, and he would not easily turn his back. To Robert Tyler, son of the former president, Wise had written, “I will support [Buchanan] as I did before, but I fear Va. will not be brought up so strongly for him as in 1852.” Once in office, Governor Letcher was equally cautious and did little more than nod in sympathy with the South Carolinians. In the end, the crisis over the speakership reached a tense stalemate: the former Whig and moderate Republican, William Pennington of New Jersey, was selected to the position.⁸⁸

Although this attempt at military action had failed, politicians now talked regularly of secession. The Virginia fire-eater Edmund Ruffin again visited the capital in June 1860, where he talked first to Mason and later to Keitt. Ruffin remembered that “both men talked freely of

⁸⁸ Muscoe R.H. Garnett to Maria Hunter Garnett, Dec. 12, 1859, typescript, Chisolm Papers, VHS; speech of Henry A. Wise quoted in William C Pendleton, *Political History of Appalachian Virginia, 1776-1927* (Dayton, Va.: Shenandoah Press, 1927), 220; Henry A. Wise to Robert Tyler, Nov. 18, 1855, Henry Alexander Wise Letter, UVA. About Wise’s moderation in 1856, see Clement Eaton, “Henry A. Wise and the Virginia Fire Eaters of 1856,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 21, no. 4 (Mar. 1935): 495-512; his liberalism more generally, Eaton, “Henry A. Wise, A Liberal of the Old South,” *Journal of Southern History* 7, no. 4 (Nov., 1941): 482-94; and his reaction to the raid on Harper’s Ferry, Craig M. Simpson, *A Good Southerner: The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1985), esp. 203-18.

the present crisis,” with Mason declaring the “end of the government” and Keitt that Lincoln’s election would mean South Carolina “shall then forthwith secede from the union.” Writing to Miles in the months before the election, Garnett regretted the inevitable result: “Lincoln will be elected, the South will submit, & I feel truly disgusted with politics.” Keitt naturally agreed. To Miles, he declared, “I thought last spring that the party might be kept together, and Mr. Hunter nominated.” Of course, the Democracy had itself disintegrated over the election of 1860. Not even the nomination of Robert Hunter would have saved it.⁸⁹

Even as the upcoming election proved ominous, the summer of 1860 brought a new crisis in the lives of the messmates: the wedding of Muscoe Russell Hunter Garnett. Ever since coming to Washington, Garnett had been looking for a suitable wife. When none proved forthcoming in his first several years in the city, he became increasingly despondent. Finally, in 1860, he courted and subsequently became engaged to Mary Picton Stevens, the daughter of the wealthy Stevens family of Hoboken, New Jersey. To his mother, Garnett could only ask: “Will you love her, too so that we three may be one?” In the ensuing months, Garnett traveled regularly to New York and New Jersey to see his new fiancée and plan the wedding, scheduled for July 1860. As the details of the wedding came into focus, Garnett wrote anxiously to his groomsmen to request their presence. To Miles, he admitted: “I am very much obliged to you, my dear fellow, for agreeing to take this long trip on my account.” The elaborate wedding banquet, held in a New York City hotel, included ten courses. After the marriage, the new

⁸⁹ Diary entry, June 13, 1860, in *Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, ed. Scarborough, 1:429; Muscoe R.H. Garnett to William P. Miles, Sept. 19, 1860, and Laurence M. Keitt to Miles, Oct. 3, 1860, in William Porcher Miles Papers, box 3, folder 32, SHC.

couple returned to the Elmwood, where Garnett made good on his promise of providing his mother a daughter.⁹⁰

After the election of Lincoln, the mess faced one final crisis. In a letter to Miles in South Carolina, Mason wished that “whilst the process is going on, & until *actual severance* somewhere, we should all be together at Washington.” As if Miles potentially not returning were not bad enough, Mason reported that “Muscoe Garnett’s late reversal of his...*original* position disintegrates our mess. Mr. Hunter & I however remain as a nucleus.” Indeed, Muscoe Garnett had once again decided to find new messmates for the session of Congress beginning December 1860. The South Carolina politico William H. Trescot reported to Miles that “I saw Garnett the other day and went house hunting with him.” Perhaps Miles, who was attending the special convention in Charleston, expected to mess with Garnett, Trescot, George Eustis (a former American Party representative from Louisiana), and possibly Keitt besides. Miles did return to Washington, for a brief period in December 1860, where he joined four of his fellow representatives in presenting an ultimatum to President Buchanan. Upon his departure, Miles parted ways with the capital and his former messmates for the last time (for his part, Garnett kept his seat in the House until the end of the session).⁹¹

⁹⁰ Muscoe R.H. Garnett to Maria Hunter Garnett, Mar. 22, 1860, Chisolm Papers, VHS; Muscoe R.H. Garnett to William P. Miles, July 7, 19, 1860, and wedding banquet menu in William Porcher Miles Papers, box 3, folder 31, SHC. About Garnett’s courtship of Mary Picton Stevens, see the various letters to his mother from January to June 1860, Chisolm Papers, VHS.

⁹¹ James M. Mason to William P. Miles, Nov. 9, 1860, and William H. Trescot to William P. Miles, Nov. 8, 1860, in William Porcher Miles Papers, box 3, folder 33 SHC. On Eustis, see Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., “George Eustis, Jr., Non-Mythic Southerner,” *Louisiana History* 16, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 383-390. See John McQueen, William P. Miles, Milledge L. Bonham, William H. Boyce, and Laurence M. Keitt to James Buchanan, Dec. 9, 1860, and Muscoe R.H. Garnett to William P. Miles, Feb. 15, 1861, William Porcher Miles Papers, box 3, folders 34 and 36, SHC. About the South Carolina commissioners, see also Jean H. Baker, “The South Has Been Wronged: James Buchanan and the Secession Crisis,” in *James Buchanan and the Coming of the Civil War*, ed. Quist and Birkner, 165-182.

Even the “nucleus” of Mason and Hunter was struggling to remain together in the face of a Republican government. As compared to Mason’s prediction of the end of the government, Hunter took a more cautious approach to secession. Still an aspirant to national power, Hunter had campaigned in the indirect style of the day for the presidency in spring 1860. When the Democratic Party split over its candidate that May, Hunter wrote dejectedly to his wife: “I mind the condition of the country far more than I do my own failure.” The four-way race did little to calm Hunter’s anxieties over the future of the divided nation. He now began to assert his southern views more fully. “I am a southern man and no one can feel a deeper interest in the preservation of the...constitutional rights of the South,” he wrote to his son Bob in 1860. To his friends in December 1860, he defended the legal right of secession, in a logical argument reminiscent of Calhoun. Still, Hunter preferred the union as the “best thing for reach if we can secure our *rights* and *equality* within that union.” In an echo of Calhoun’s *Disquisition on Government*, Hunter proffered the idea of a dual executive as a possible solution to the nation’s problems.⁹²

Both Hunter and Mason treaded very carefully in the winter months of 1861. When news came in early January that President Buchanan had ordered the removal of arms from Virginia’s arsenals, Mason and Hunter wrote immediately for confirmation (not at all, came the terse answer from the chief executive). Informed of the news that he had been nominated to the Virginia state secession convention, Hunter wrote to Benjamin Baird, “I can perform more real

⁹² On Hunter during the secession crisis, see William S. Hitchcock, “Southern Moderates and Secession: Senator Robert M.T. Hunter’s Call for Union,” *Journal of American History* 59, no. 4 (Mar. 1973): 871-84; and Richard R. Moore, “Robert M.T. Hunter and the Crisis of the Union, 1860-1861,” *Southern Historian* 13 (Spring 1992): 25-35. Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, May 11, 1860, *Papers of Robert M.T. Hunter*, reel 6; Robert M.T. Hunter to Robert M.T. Hunter, Jr., Nov. 22, 1860, in *ibid.*, reel 6; Robert M.T. Hunter to James R. Micou, Thomas Croxton, and Others Signing the Call, Dec. 10, 1860, in *Correspondence of Robert M.T. Hunter*, ed. Ambler, 337-39; Robert M.T. Hunter to George Booker, Dec. 14, [1860], George Booker Papers, DUL; Moore, “In Search of a Safe Government,” 285-309.

service to my state & country more here than elsewhere. I think this is the opinion of my fellow seceders from the South.” But pressures continued to mount. “I wish you would put your shoulder to the wheel and bring Virginia into our confederacy,” the South Carolinian William W. Boyce implored Hunter in early February. For his part, Mason continued to defend his southern colleagues, including the Texas firebrand Louis T. Wigfall whom he sustained in his final speech in the Senate on March 11. Finally, on March 28 while still living together in their Washington mess, Hunter and Mason made the fateful decision to resign their seats. In this final act as United States senators from Virginia, Mason and Hunter once again acted together and in the near perfect unison that had come to define their decades’ long relationship.⁹³

The Civil War, in a sense, would claim the livelihoods of the original duo of Mason and Hunter. Expelled from the U.S. Senate in the summer, both men continued to render public service to the new Confederate government. Of the two, Mason was most famously associated with John Slidell, when the two men were captured on their way to Britain to conduct diplomatic negotiations on behalf of the Confederacy. Hunter became the first Secretary of State under Jefferson Davis, and later as a member of the Confederate Senate, President *pro tem* of that body, and chair of the Finance Committee. Always committed to the idea of reconciliation, Hunter served as part of a three-member delegation that met with President Lincoln on board a Union steamer off the coast of Virginia in 1865, but nothing came of the so-called Hampton

⁹³ For the exchange with Buchanan, see James M. Mason and Robert M.T. Hunter to James Buchanan, Jan. 9, 1861, and Buchanan to Mason and Hunter, Jan. 10, 1861, *Works of James Buchanan*, ed. Moore, 11:102-104. Robert M.T. Hunter to Benjamin R. Baird, Jan. 23, 1861; Baird Family Papers, box 16, folder 1, CWM. M. W. Boyer [*sic*] to Robert M.T. Hunter, Feb. 5, 1861, *Papers of Robert M.T. Hunter*, UVA, reel 7 (the writer of the letter is actually William W. Boyce); for Mason’s final speech, see Mason, *Public Correspondence of James Murray Mason*, 185-190; and see also the entry in *Diary of a Public Man*, ed. Bullard, 104: “Nothing will come of it all, and it only gives occasion to men like Mr. Mason to add fuel to the flame all over the country, by discussing and debating the circumstances in which it will be necessary for them to swell the list of seceders and for their States to go out for the Union.” See also James M. Mason to Samuel Chew, April 15, 1861, Chew Family Papers, box 402, folder 17, HSP, in which he declared: “War is begun. When or how to end is beyond the ken or the control of man.”

Roads Conference. The same could be said of Mason's efforts to convince Great Britain to recognize the Confederacy (Queen Victoria's government would have none of it).⁹⁴

While Mason and Hunter were together in Richmond in attendance at the Confederate Congress, they continued to see one another as possible. The same was true for Muscoe Garnett, who continued to dine with Mason on occasion. With Miles in Charleston, the former messmates were not in regular contact. When Muscoe Garnett heard from Mary Chesnut that Miles had married the wealthy widow Betty Beirne, he wrote to his former messmate with best wishes: "I can assure you that the new chapter of life you are opening has in store for you happiness brighter than your highest hopes, glowing as they now are." That would prove to be Garnett's final letter to Miles. In February 1864, while finally making good on his resolution to quit politics altogether, Garnett fell acutely ill, possibly with appendicitis. "Poor Muscoe," Robert Hunter had written to Line when he heard the news of his favorite nephew's condition. Garnett never left Richmond, where he succumbed to his illness on February 14.⁹⁵

With the Civil War at an end, Mason and Hunter faced the personal and political repercussions of supporting the Confederate cause. Mason fled to Canada from England, while Hunter remained in his native Virginia, where he was briefly arrested. The two men continued their correspondence after the war, though they lost touch for a period of years. In 1869, Mason wrote Hunter from Virginia, having returned there after eight years total in exile. He complained in his letter that Hunter had not replied to two previous letters, but no matter, "let bye-gones be bye-gones, I really want to see you and I assume that you want to see me." Mason predicted the two men might benefit from a conversation about the war, adding "I think when we put our

⁹⁴ Young, *Senator James Murray Mason*, 107-180; Moore, "In Search of a Safe Government," 310-41.

⁹⁵ Muscoe R.H. Garnett to William P. Miles, June 19, 1863, and James M. Mason to William P. Miles, December 15, 18[63], William Miles Papers, box 3, folder 52, SHC. Robert M.T. Hunter to Mary Eveline Dandridge Hunter, Feb. 12, 1864, Hunter Papers [Old Series], box 9, folder 5, VHS.

heads together, looking back at the past, and bringing the material before use, we might project something....” Hunter received Mason’s letter, but if he replied, no record survives.⁹⁶

Ever persistent, Mason wrote Hunter again two years later. Evidently the two men had not exchanged letters for some time. Mason’s final letter to Hunter in January 1871, written just months before his own death, depicts a man debilitated by the effects of age and war. “I have been pretty much confined at home with this dreary winter,” he reported. “In this condition of things, it is impossible for me to get to you and yet we ought to meet again before the scene closes on us for ever,” Mason reminisced. Even in this last letter, Mason wrote to Hunter in the mode of a friend, recalling anecdotes of mutual acquaintances and longing for a future rendezvous as in times of old. Two weeks later, Hunter replied to his erstwhile friend and messmate. In his letter, Hunter expressed a strong desire to see Mason soon, but the timing was not in their favor. Mason died two months later in April 1871, nearly ten years since he had last seen his former Washington companion.⁹⁷

* * * * *

Political alliances are often marriages of convenience between parties seeking favorable outcomes. They are often fleeting and *ad hoc*, lasting as long as they are expedient to both parties concerned. Political alliances based on friendships, by contrast, may very well have a greater propensity to persist through the cycles of elections and party politics. Like James Buchanan and William Rufus King, James M. Mason and Robert M.T. Hunter shared one such friendship. They dined, socialized, and lived together through years of sectional strife and political turmoil. Indeed, the most important political decision Mason and Hunter ever made was

⁹⁶ James M. Mason to Robert M.T. Hunter, Oct. 15, 1869, Hunter-Garnett Papers, box 39, UVA.

⁹⁷ James M. Mason to Robert M.T. Hunter, June 23, 1870, Hunter Family Papers (Old Series), box 11, VHS; Robert M.T. Hunter to James M. Mason, Feb. 14, 1871, typescript, Hunter-Garnett Papers (Collection of Launcelot M. Blackford), UVA.

to live together as one family while in Washington. From this living arrangement followed their association first with the states' rights leader John C. Calhoun, and later with the more radical disunionists Andrew P. Butler and, especially, David R. Atchison. By the winter of 1854, the future of slavery in the western territories had come to hinge on the four senators who lived together as one family on F Street. As one political family, then, the members of the F Street Mess succeeded in introducing the territorial organization bill that became the Kansas-Nebraska Act. When their support combined with that of the administration's prerogative, the bill was assured to become law.

Mason and Hunter's commitment to live together as one family did not diminish with time. With the inclusion of "youngsters of the household," the relatively moderate Mason and Hunter associated themselves with the more radical Muscoe Garnett and the fire-eating ultra William P. Miles. When combined with John Brown's dramatic raid on Harper's Ferry and the success of the Republican Party, this association with Garnett and Miles pushed them to consider the separation that lay ahead. Of course, the ironic consequence of the close friendships formed in the mess was its logical, though unexpected, termination with the coming of the war in 1861. Although each man would play his part, not only in the new Confederate government but in staying apprised of one another's lives, the Civil War destroyed both their surrogate family and actual families as well. Between Muscoe Garnett's death in 1864, the deaths of several of Hunter's children, and the desecration of Mason's cherished Selma home—leveled brick by brick by invading Union soldiers, the world Mason and Hunter had once known was gone forever.

As a political strategy, then, the home that James Mason and Robert Hunter had built incorporated other men whose states' rights principles accorded with their own. Although not

secessionists to start, over time their very actions had made such a course necessary. By the 1850s, the alliances of Democrats such as Mason and Hunter could no longer be merely personal. Now, they realized, they needed to band together to resist the threats to their political power, based on slavery and its future expansion, from a new brand of northern politician hell-bent on stopping the institution from further growth. One such figure was Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts. Well educated, a man of refined literary tastes, and a bachelor, under different circumstances Sumner would have been a natural companion for the mess of Mason and Hunter. But, the new breed of northern politicians, which included Sumner, wanted nothing to do with the southern slaveholder, however gentlemanly he might be. Moreover, creating a home and living together as one family offered little appeal. Instead, through the moral power of friendships formed back home, Charles Sumner sought to rupture the domestic arrangements that the peculiar institution the members of the F Street Mess had enabled and helped to sustain.

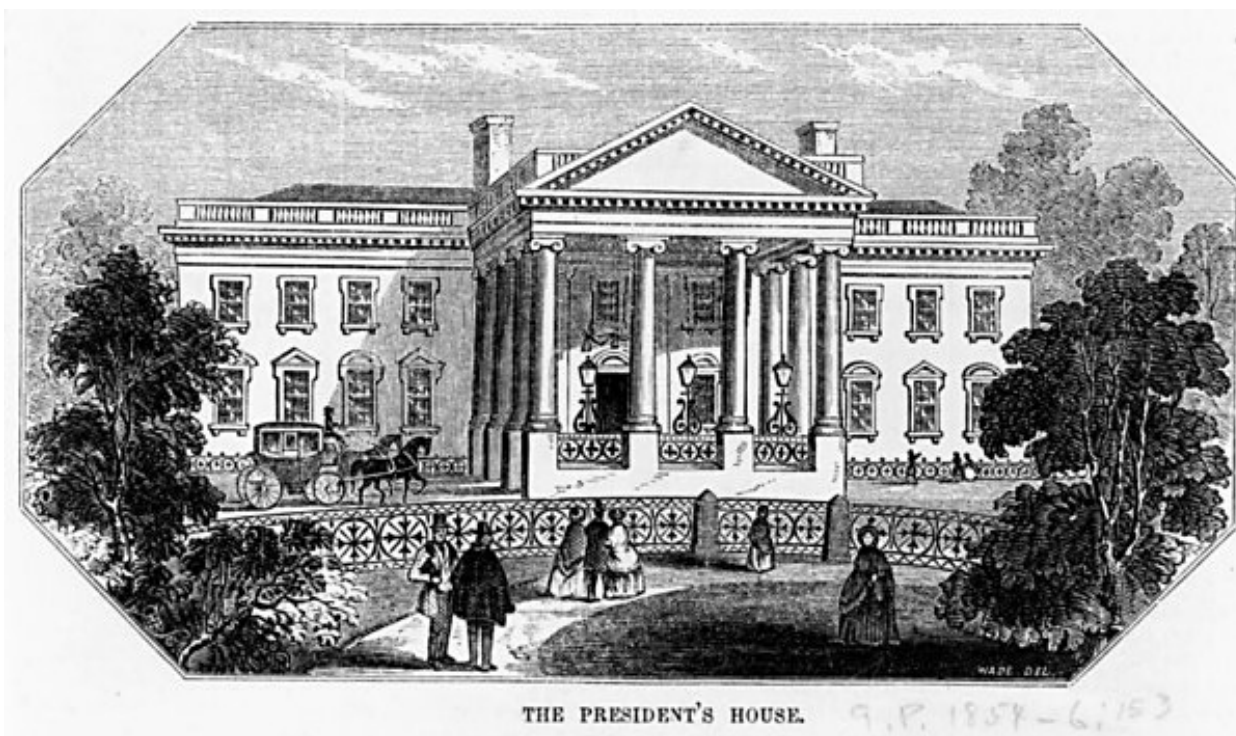


Figure 1: The President's House, ca. 1854. LOT 4386-59F, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

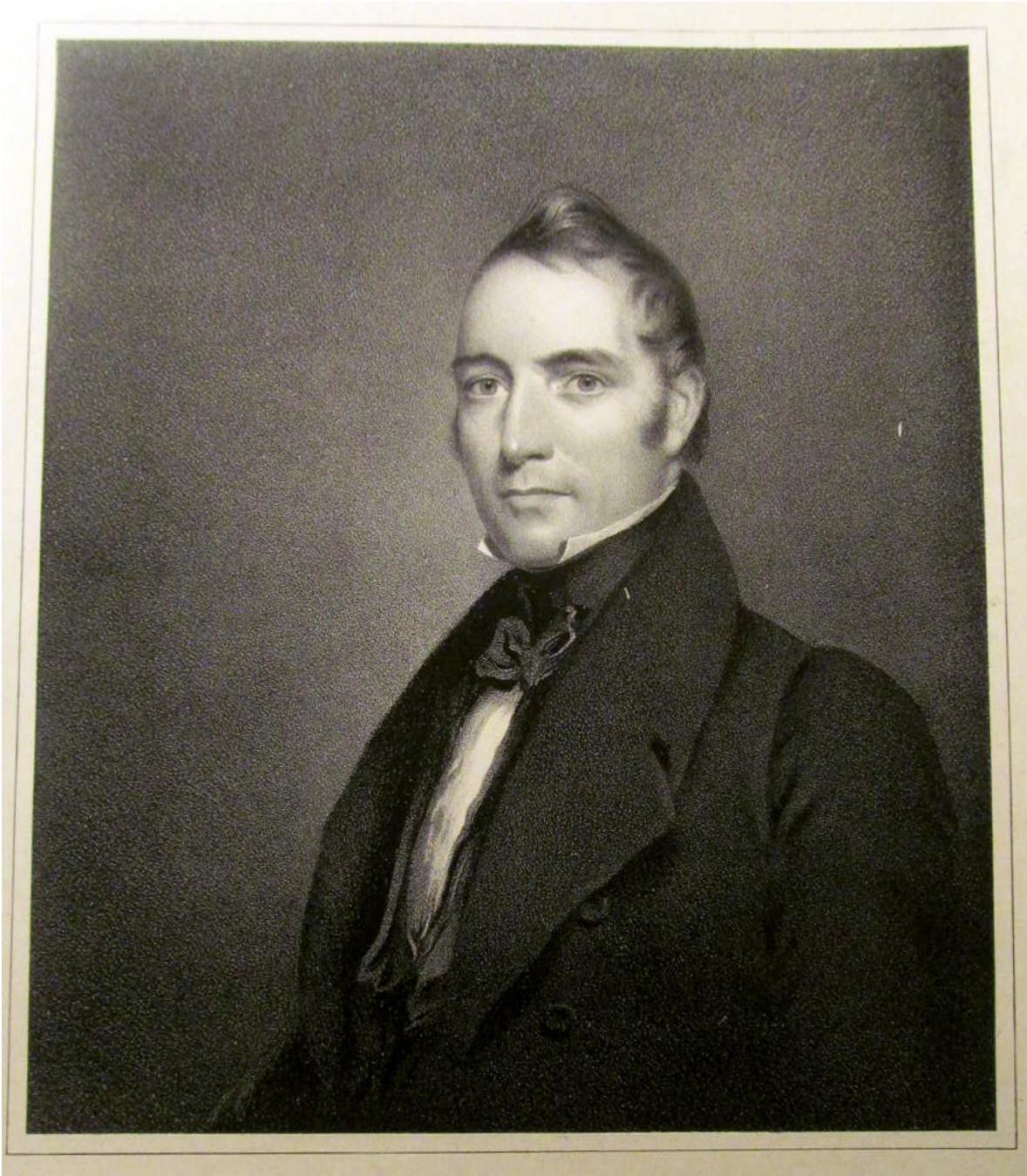


Figure 2: William Rufus King, ca. 1825. Albert Newsam Collections (V-100), box 6, folder 3, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Figure 3: James Buchanan. Engraving by John Sartain, ca. 1840. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

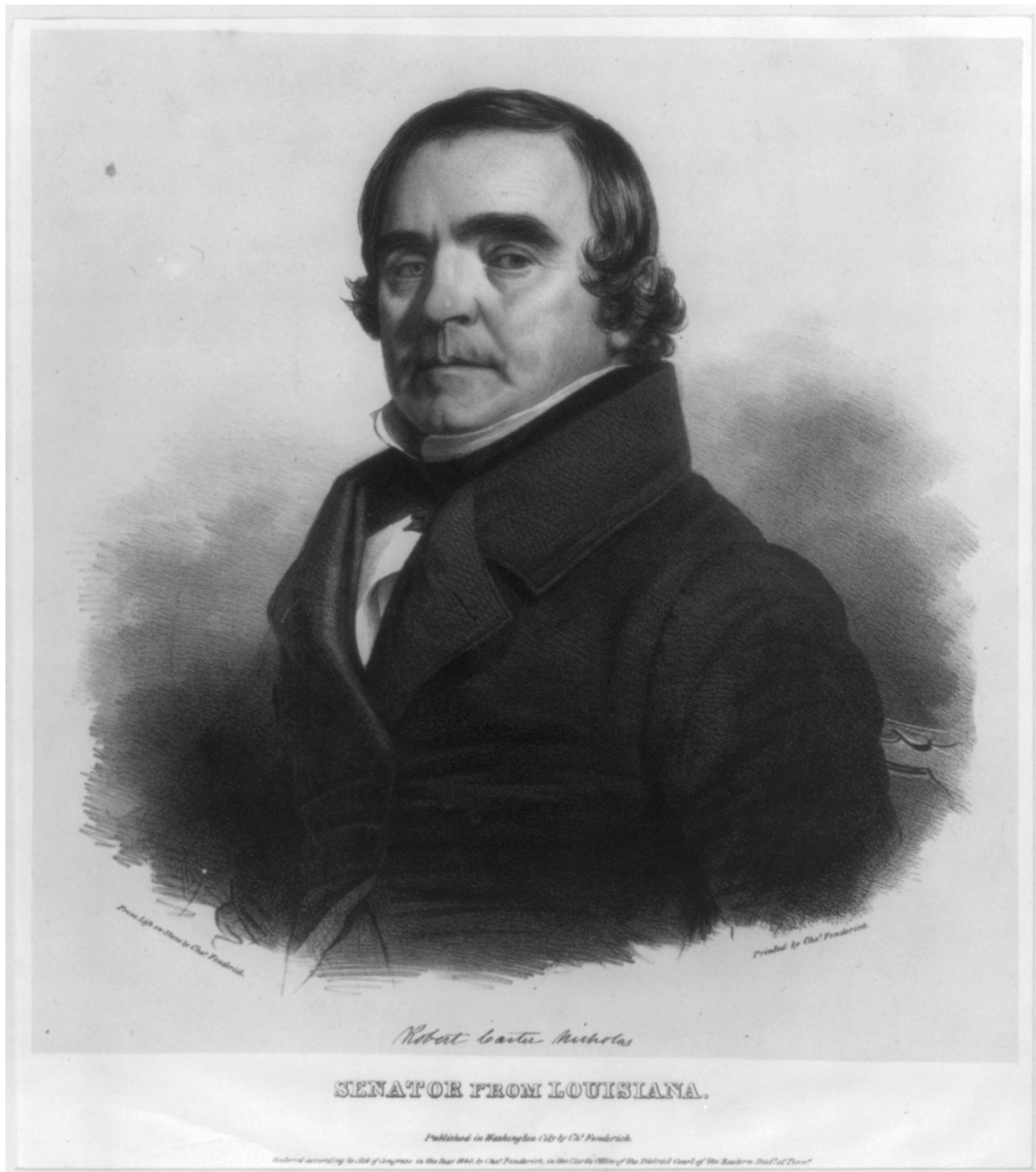


Figure 4: Robert C. Nicholas, ca. 1840. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

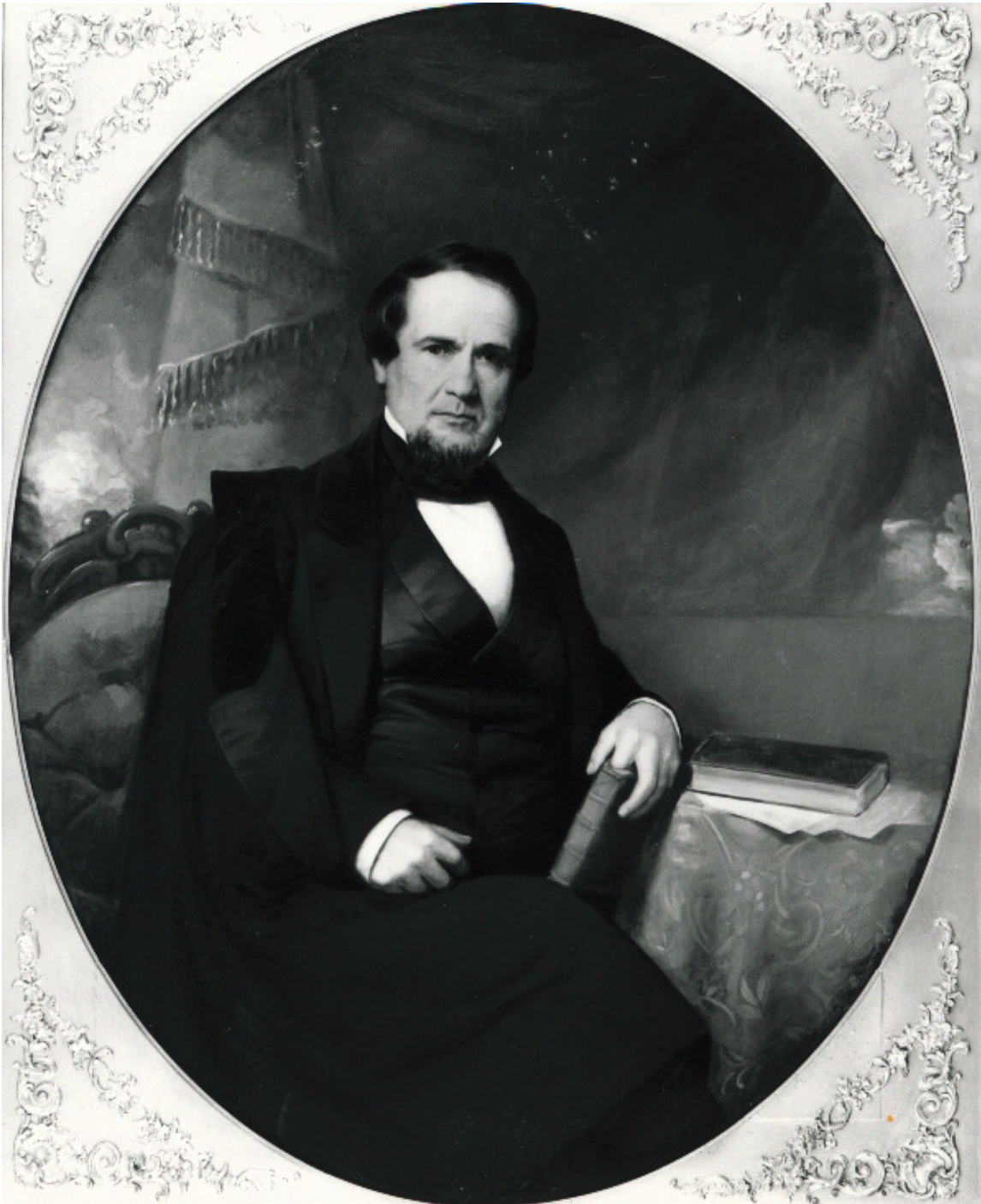


Figure 5: Aaron V. Brown, ca. 1845. Courtesy of the Tennessee State Library and Archives.



Figure 6 (from left to right): Sec. of State James Buchanan, Harriet Lane, Sarah Polk Rucker, Mr. Cave Johnson, Post Master General; President and Mrs. James K. Polk; Judge John Y. Mason, Secretary of the Navy; Dolley Madison; Mrs. Cave Johnson, and unidentified male. 1847. Daguerreotype. Collection of the George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.



Figure 7: "Silhouettes of the Famous Class of 1825 – Bowdoin College." Reprinted from the Special Bowdoin Edition of the *Lewiston Journal*, June 25, 1902, this print shows the silhouettes of the Bowdoin Class of 1825. First Row: Nathaniel Hawthorne, John S.C. Abbott, George W. Pierce, Elisha Bacon, Richmond Bradford, Jeremiah Dummer, Cyrus Hamlin Coolidge. Second Row: Henry W. Longfellow, Patrick Henry Greenleaf, Jonathan Cilley, Alden Boynton, Frederic Mellen, Samuel Page Benson, Mark Haskell Newman. Third Row: David Shepley, William Hale, David Haley Foster, Alfred Martin, Nathaniel Dunn, Seward Wyman, Gorham Deane. Fourth Row: Horatio Bridge, Thomas Ayer, Edward Joseph Vose, Charles Snell, Eugene Weld, John Dafforne Kinsman, George Barrell Cheever. Fifth Row: Joseph Jenkins Eveleth, Joseph Stover Little, Hezekiah Packard, Alfred Mason, Charles Jeffrey Abbott, Stephen Longfellow, James Ware Bradbury. Sixth Row: Edward Deering Preble, William Stone, Cullen Sawtelle. Courtesy collections of the Maine Historical Society.



Figure 8: Jonathan Cilley, 1837. Wood engraving, printed on paper. New Hampshire Historical Society Collection.



Figure 9: John P. Hale, between 1844 and 1860. Daguerreotype by Matthew Brady. DAG no. 112, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

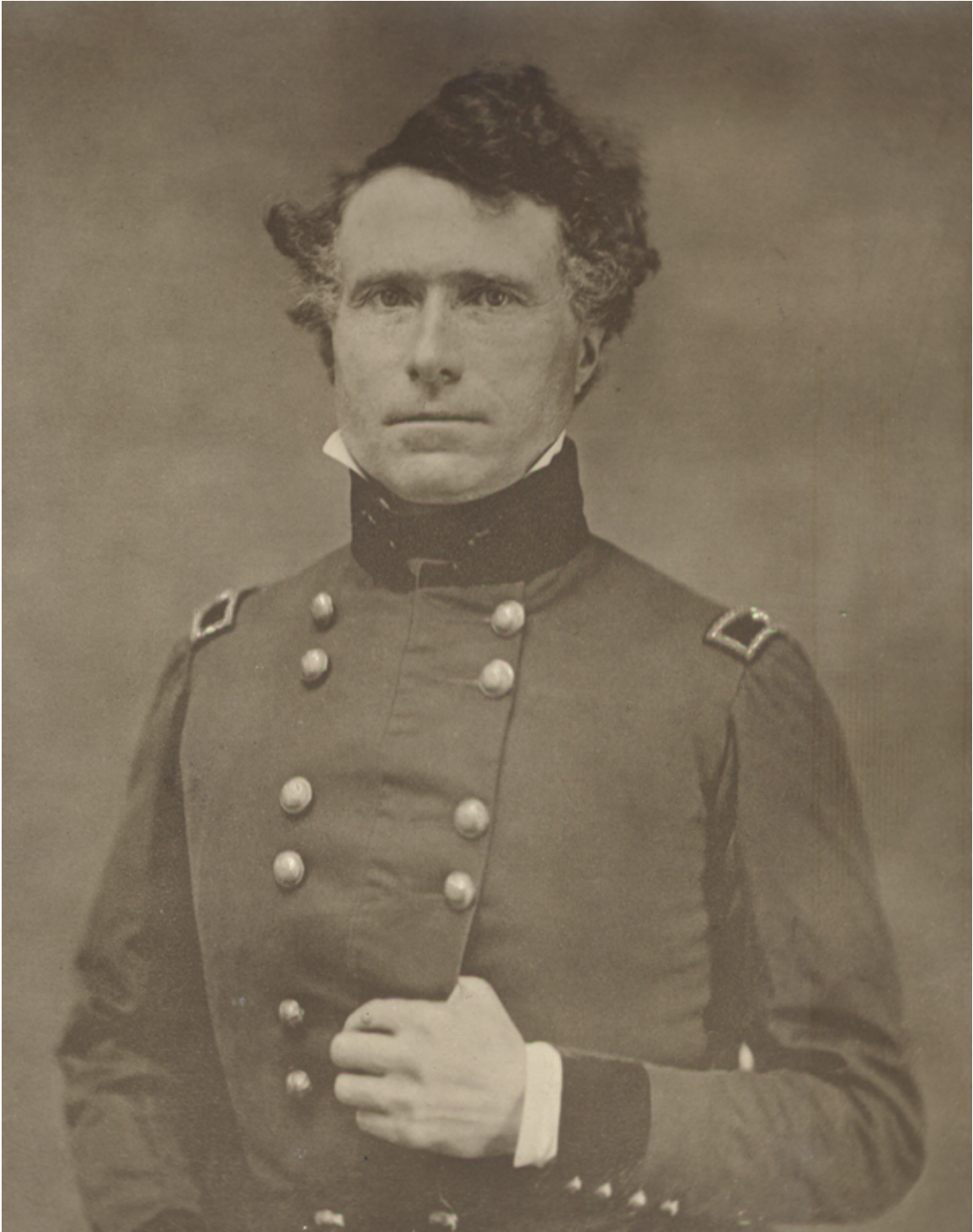


Figure 10: Franklin Pierce, ca. 1852. Daguerreotype by William H. Kimball. New Hampshire Historical Society Collection.

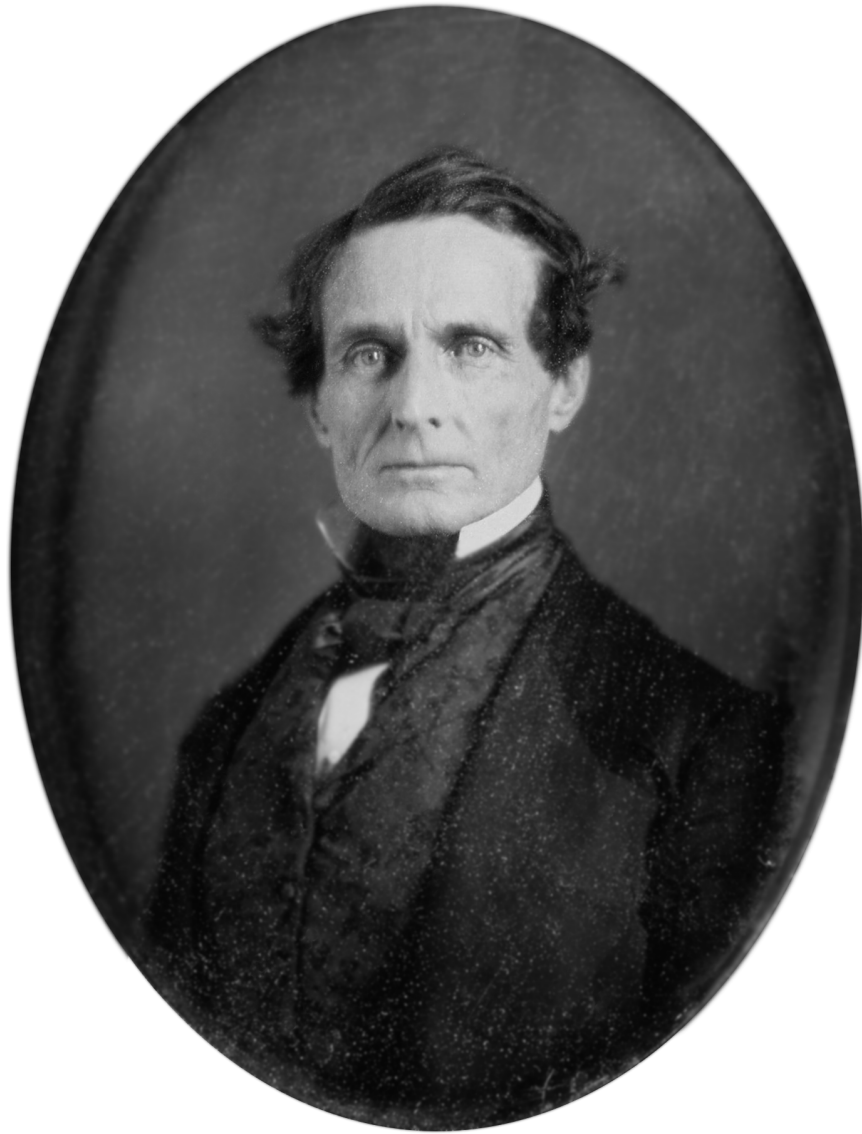


Figure 11: Jefferson Davis, ca. 1853. Daguerreotype. Courtesy Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Va.

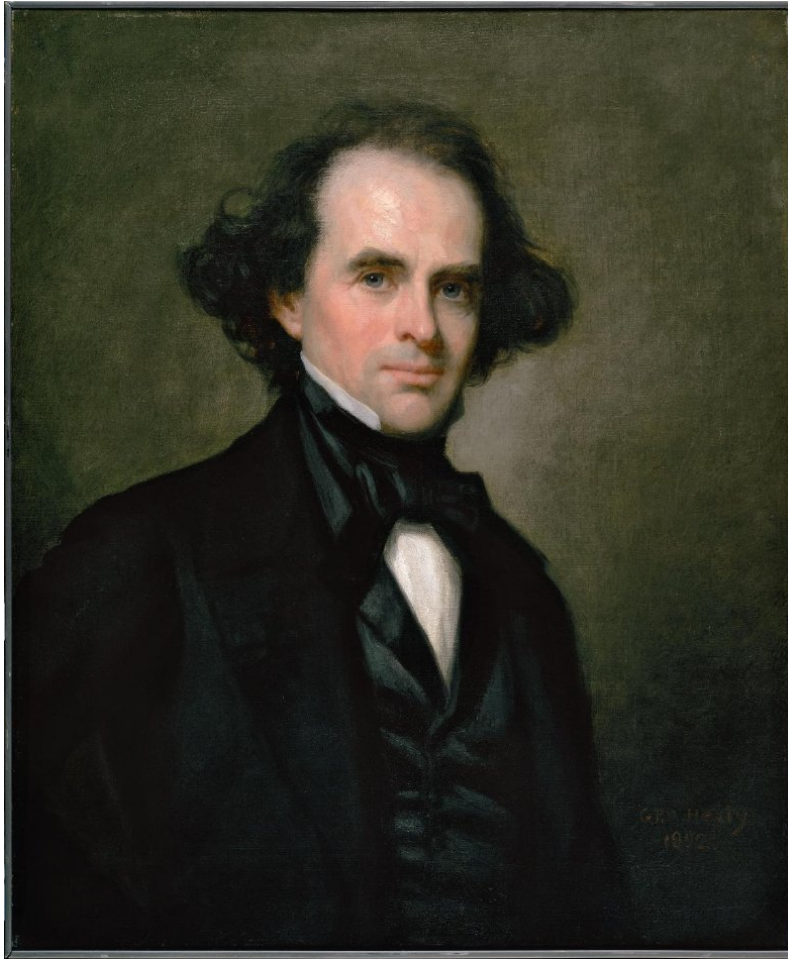


Figure 12: Nathaniel Hawthorne. Portrait by G.P.A. Healy, 1852. Oil on canvas. New Hampshire Historical Society Collection.

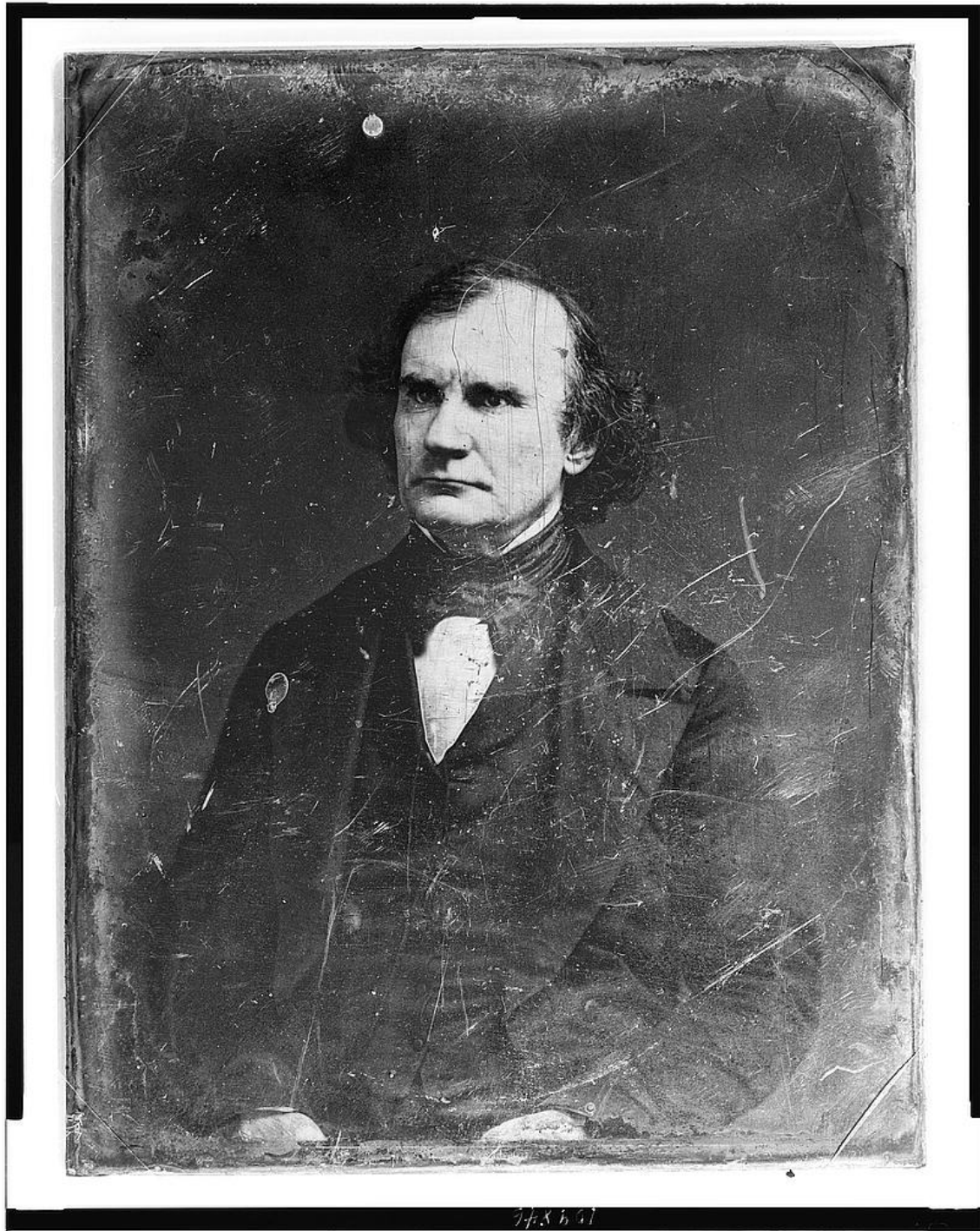


Figure 13: James M. Mason, between 1846 and 1860. Daguerreotype by Matthew Brady. DAG no. 018, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

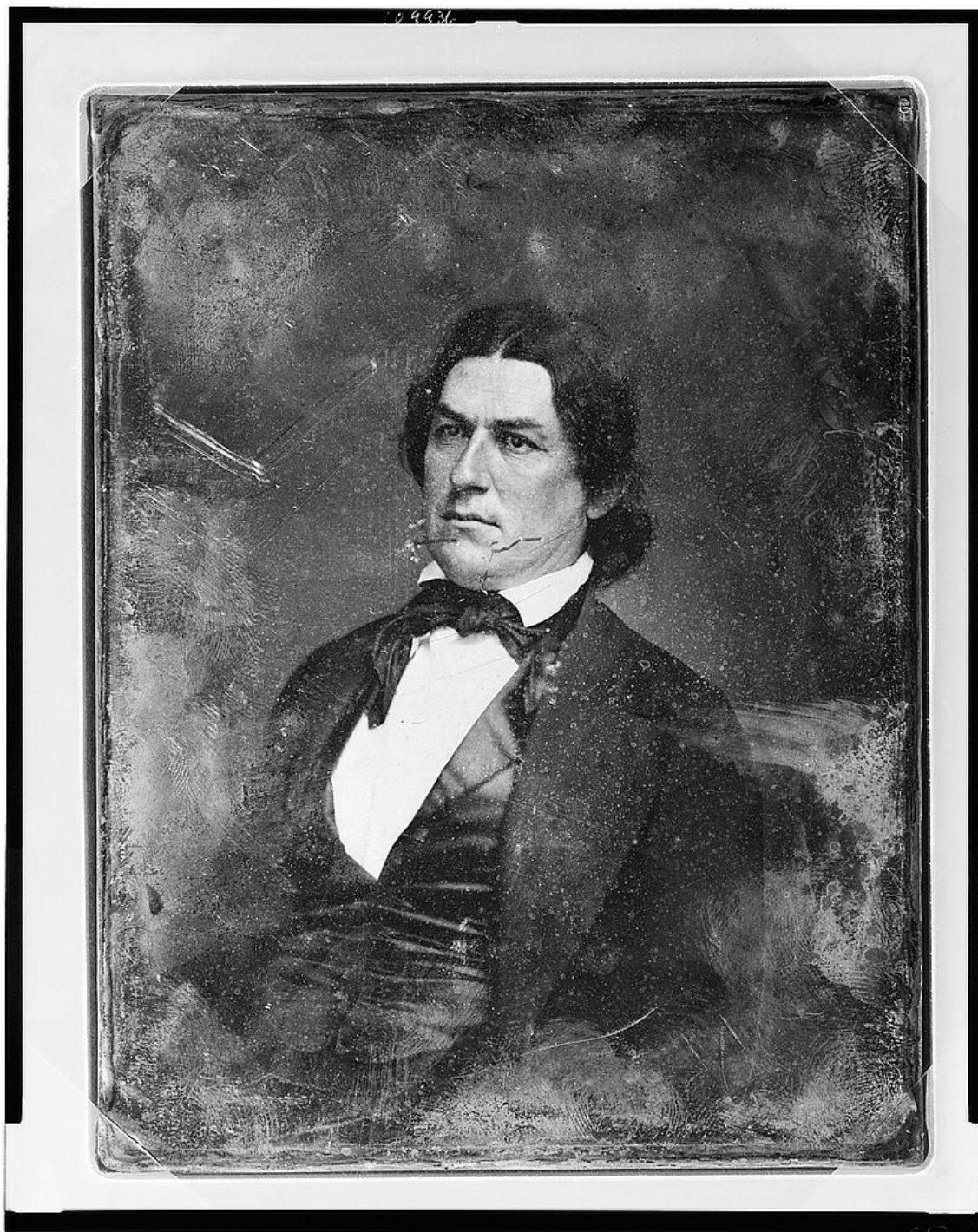


Figure 14: Robert M.T. Hunter, between 1844 and 1860. Daguerreotype by Matthew Brady. DAG no. 114, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



Figure 15: Andrew P. Butler, ca. Mar. 1849. Daguerreotype by Mathew Brady. Courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

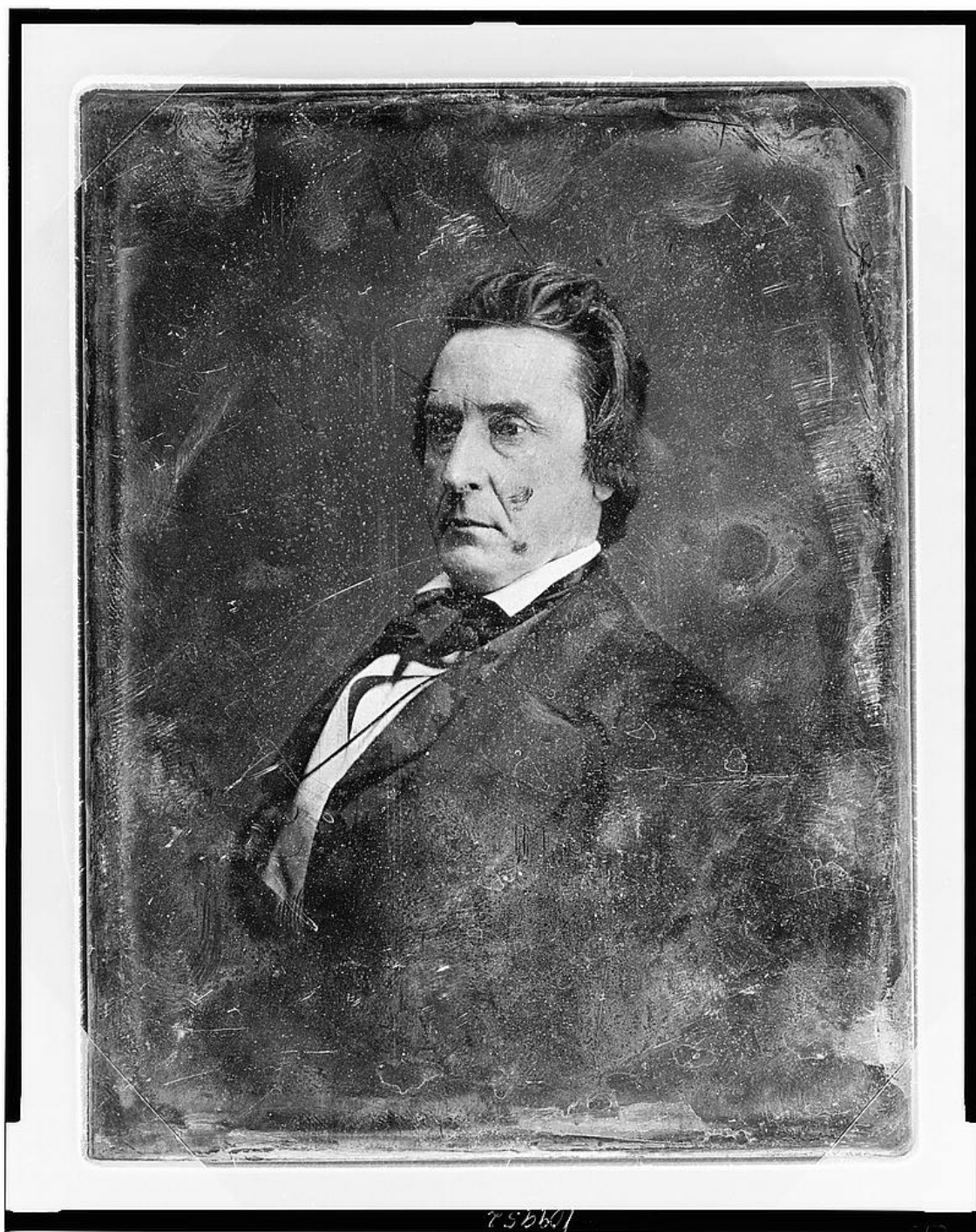


Figure 16: David R. Atchison, between 1844 and 1860. Daguerreotype by Matthew Brady. DAG no. 134, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



Figure 17: Old Patent Office (front façade), brick buildings visible on F Street, ca. 1846. The F Street Mess was located down the street to the right of the brick building present in the foreground. The Old Patent Office is now home to the Smithsonian Museum of American Art. DAG no. 1229, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

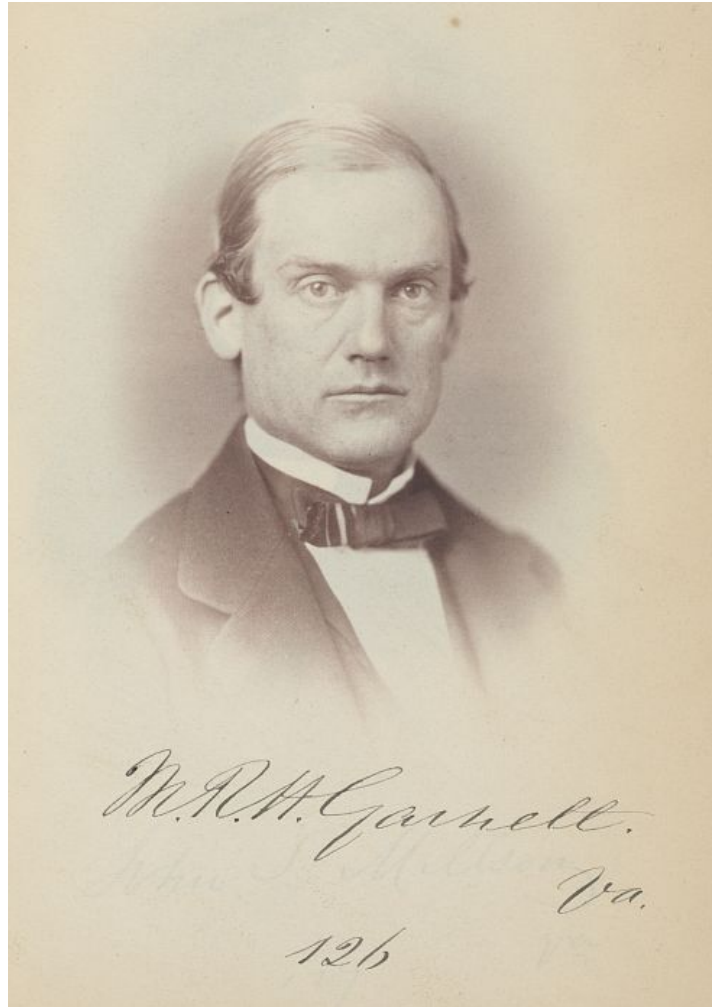


Figure 18: Muscoe R.H. Garnett, ca. 1859. Illustration in *McClees' Gallery of Photographic Portraits of the Senators, Representatives & Delegates of the Thirty-Fifth Congress* (Washington, D.C.: McClees & Beck, [1859]), 126.



Figure 19: Charles Sumner, ca. 1846. Portrait by Eastman Johnson. Courtesy Longfellow House, National Park Service.



Figure 20: Henry W. Longfellow, ca. 1846. Portrait by Eastman Johnson. Courtesy Longfellow House, National Park Service.

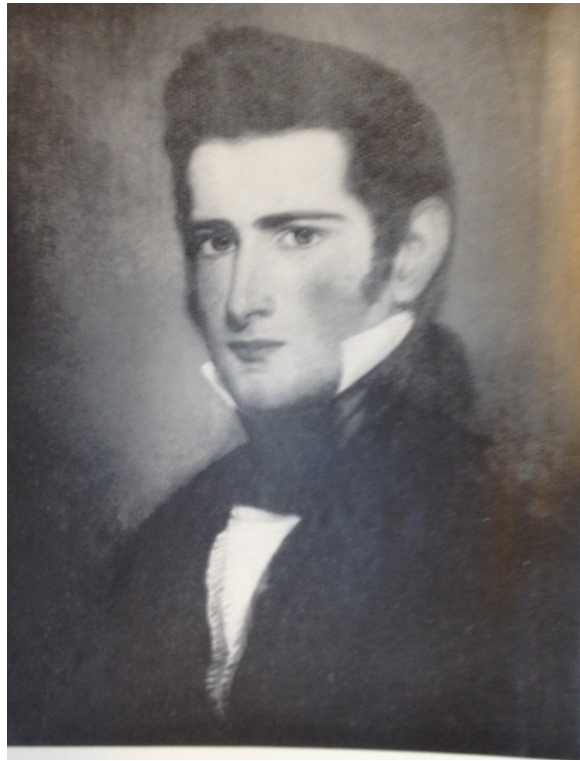


Figure 21: Samuel G. Howe, ca. 1830s. Portrait by Jane Stuart. Oil on canvas.



Figure 22: George S. Hillard, ca. 1860s. Daguerreotype.



Figure 23: Cornelius C. Felton, ca. 1850s. Carte de visite. Warren's Portrait Studio, Boston.

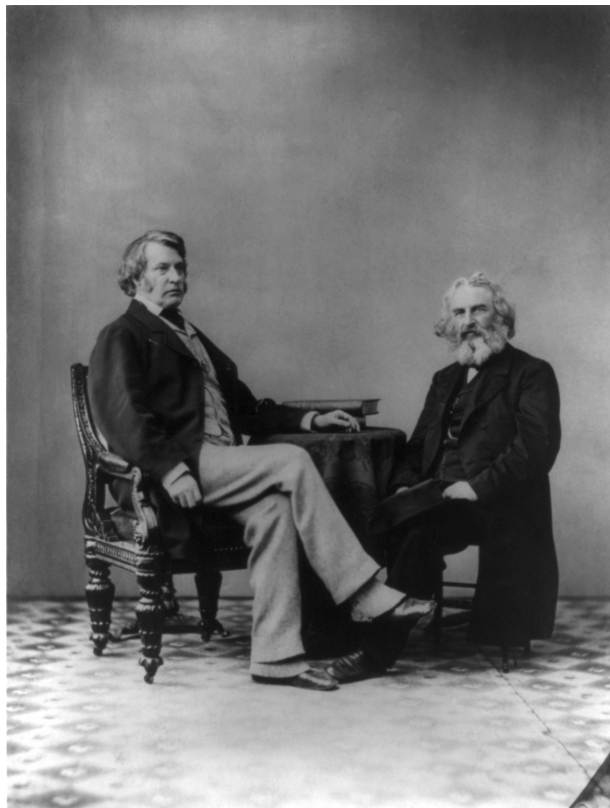


Figure 24: "Politics and Poetry of New England." Daguerreotype by Alexander Gardner, 1863. PH - Gardner (A.), no. 12, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

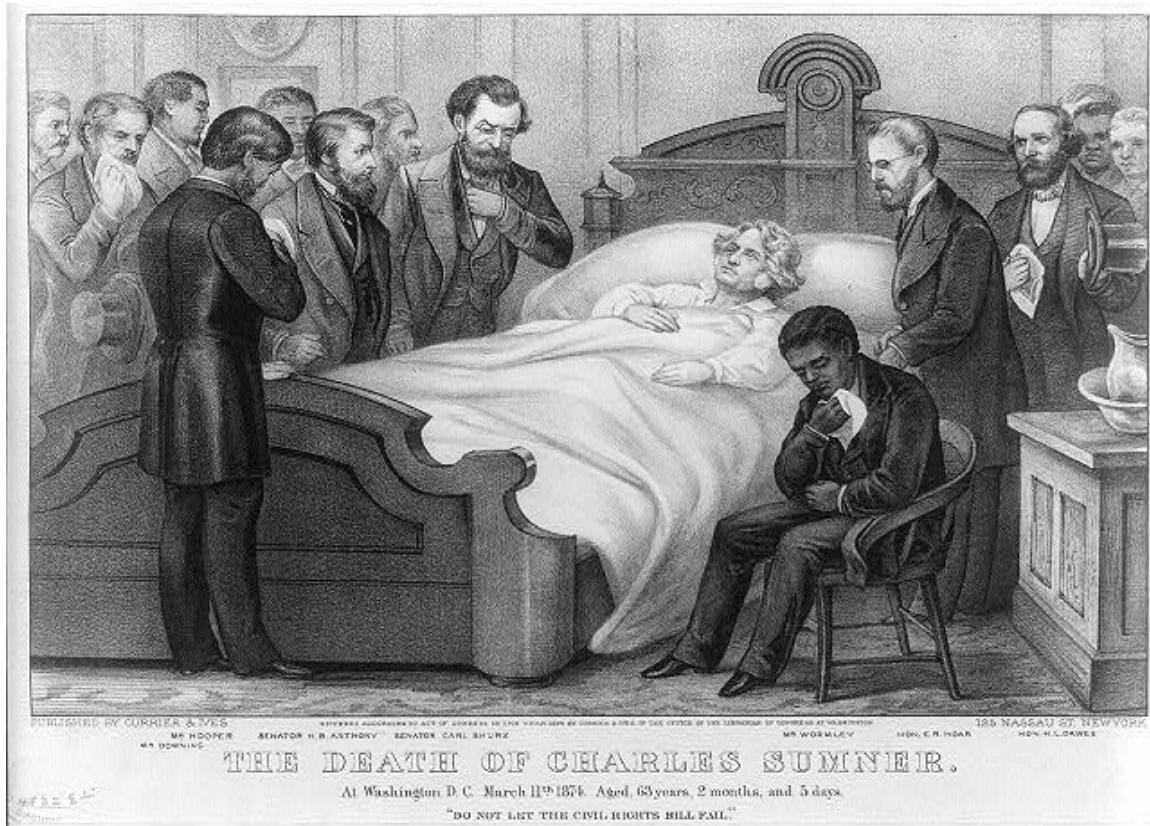


Figure 25: "The Death of Charles Sumner: At Washington D.C. March 11th 1874. Aged, 63 years, 2 months, and 5 days" ([New York]: Currier & Ives, 1874). From Gale Research, ed., *Currier & Ives: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1983), no. 1601.

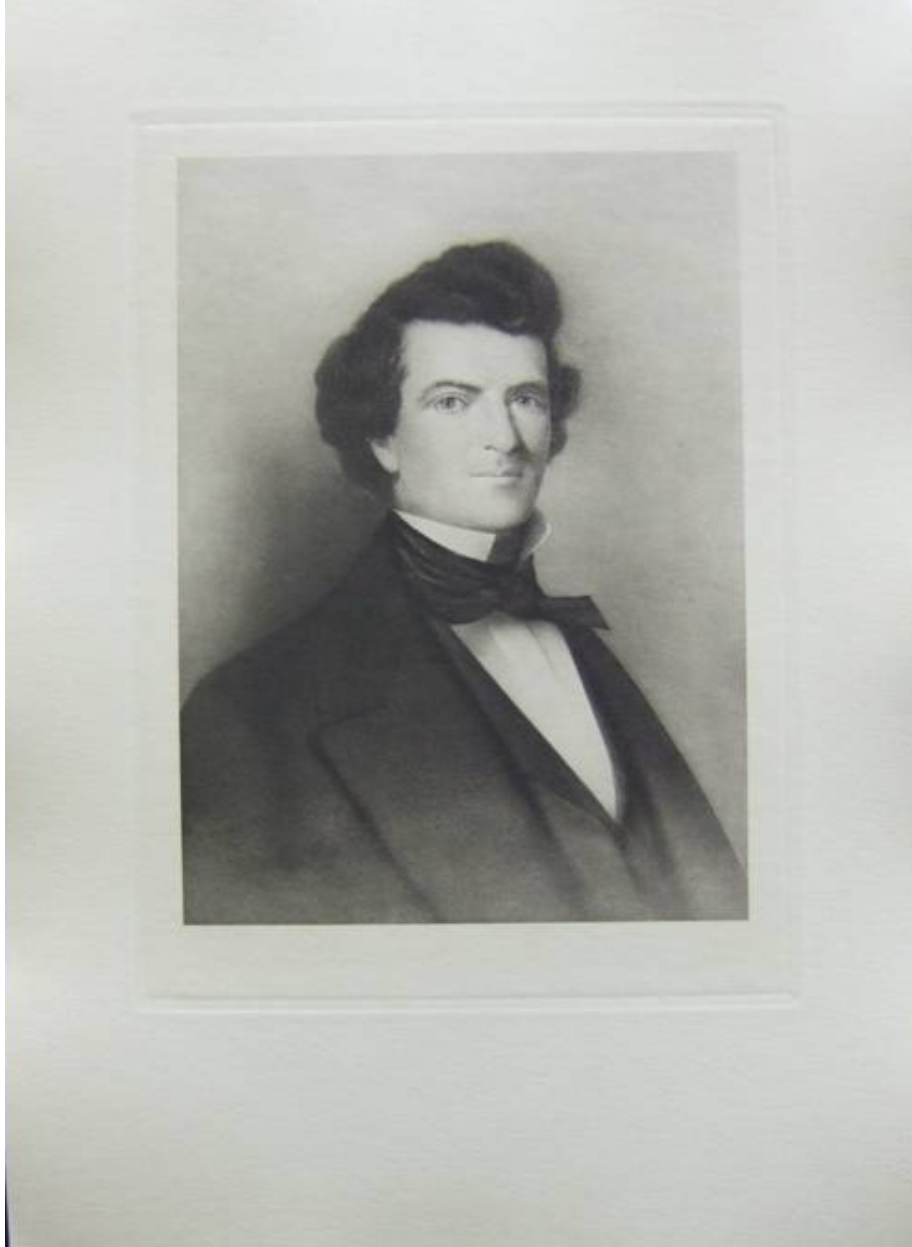


Figure 26: Preston S. Brooks, ca. 1840. Photo print of portrait. Courtesy of the Edgefield Historical Society.



Figure 27: Louis T. Wigfall, ca. 1861. LOT 4213, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



Figure 28: Preston S. Brooks, ca. 1856. Unattributed, no. 19 (AA size). Salted paper print. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

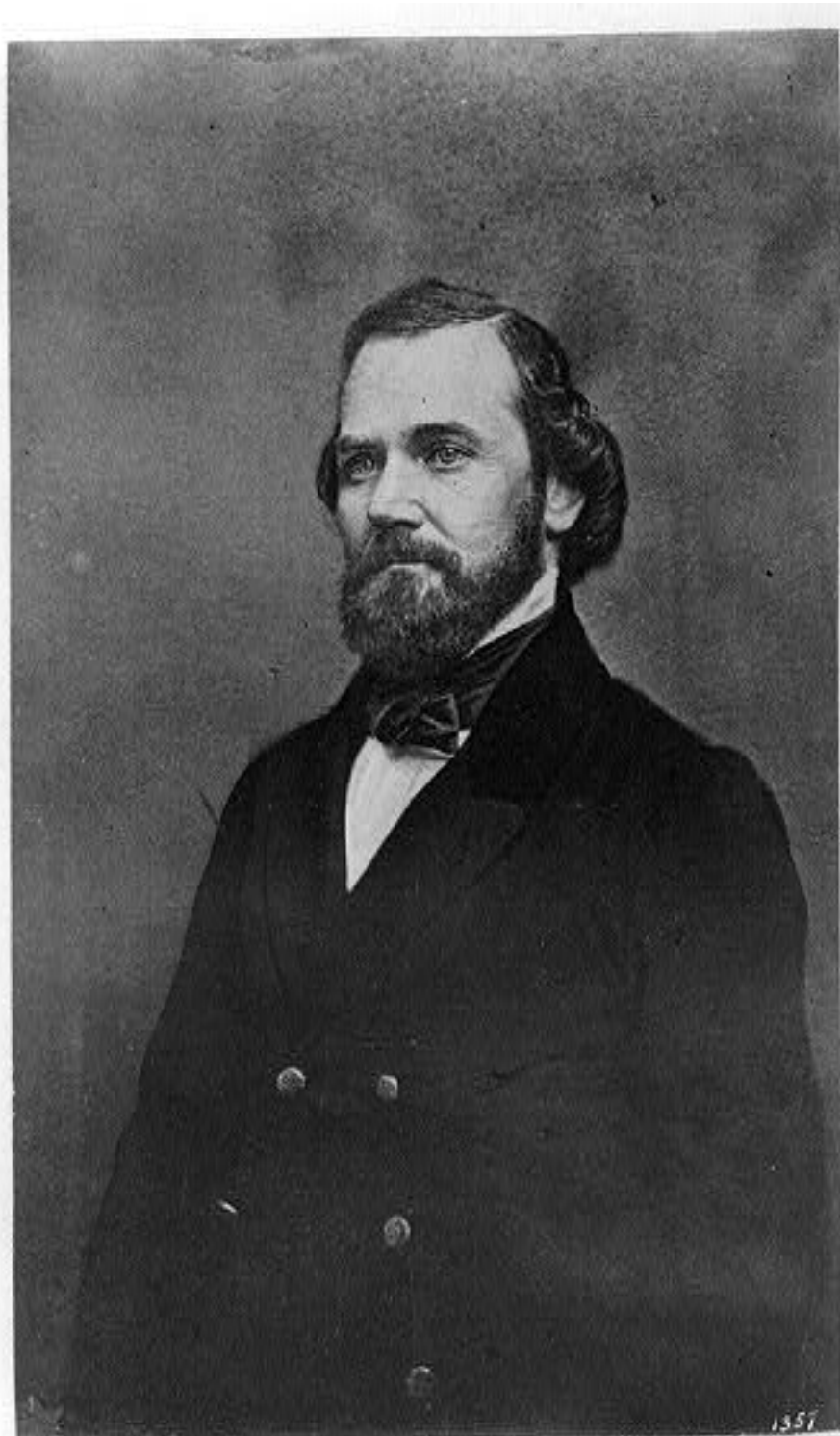


Figure 29: Laurence M. Keitt, ca. 1859. Daguerreotype. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

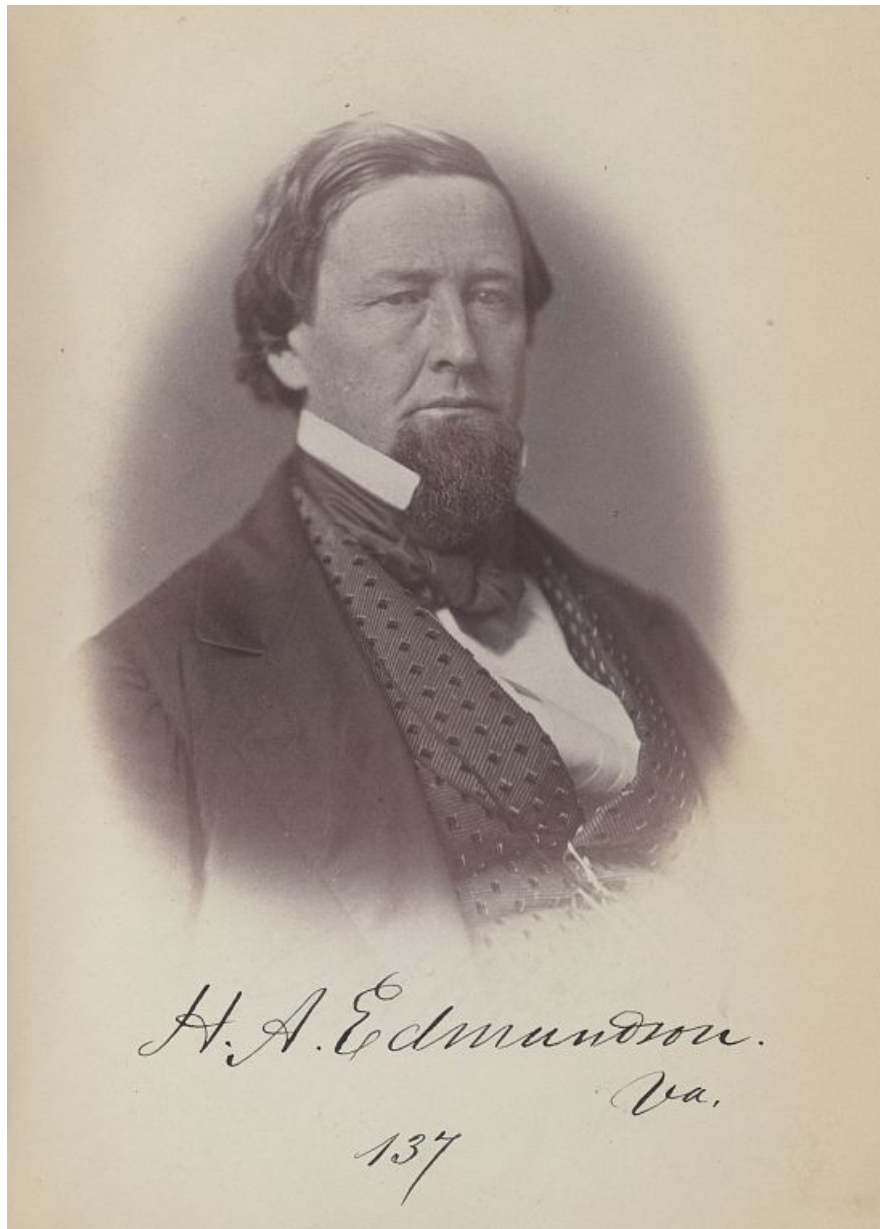


Figure 30: Henry A. Edmundson. Illustration in *McClees' Gallery of Photographic Portraits of the Senators, Representatives & Delegates of the Thirty-Fifth Congress* (Washington, D.C.: McClees & Beck, [1859]), 137.

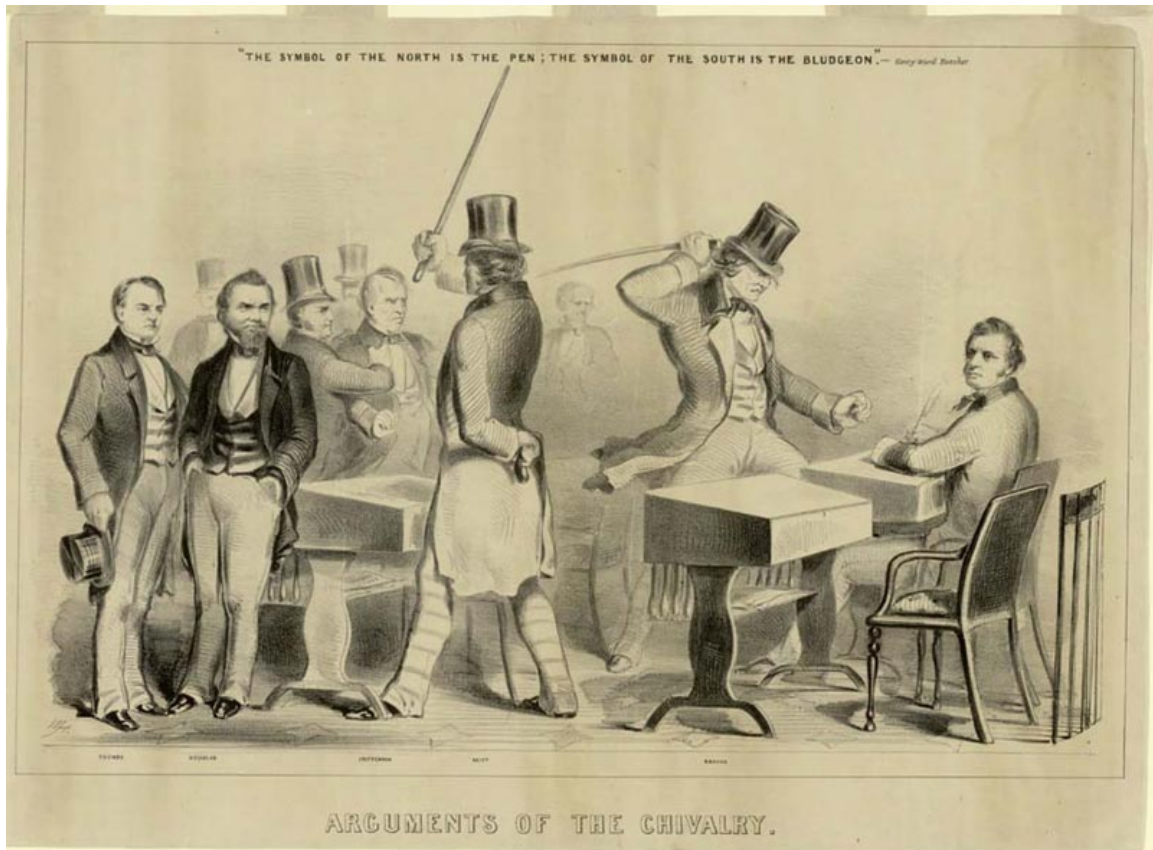


Figure 31: “Arguments of the Chivalry” (1856). Engraving by Winslow Homer. The inscription reads, “The symbol of the North is the pen; the symbol of the South is the bludgeon,”—Henry Ward Beecher. Brooks (*right*) is standing over Sumner (*seated*), while M. Keitt stands (*center*) raises his cane against possible intervention and holds a pistol. In the foreground are Georgia Senator Robert Toombs (*far left with hat*) and Illinois Senator Stephen A Douglas (*hands in pockets*).



Figure 32: "Southern Chivalry – Argument versus Club's." Lithograph by John L. Magee. Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society.

CHAPTER 4:
CHARLES SUMNER IN CRISIS

“I could not believe that a thing like this was possible.”

--Charles Sumner in conversation, May 22, 1856

On May 22, 1856, the South Carolina representative Preston Smith Brooks entered the floor of the United States Senate and caned Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner. The unprecedented and severe beating shattered both Sumner's body and his psyche, preventing his return to the Senate for some three years. Yet the attack was not entirely without precedent. After all, violence of various kinds had been a feature of political life from the earliest days of the U.S. Congress and generally continued without interruption through the start of the Civil War. For the most part, these violent outbursts were little commented upon. Certainly, the nation was outraged when William Graves killed Jonathan Cilley in their duel of February 1838. But other than the deeply personal tragedy for men such as Franklin Pierce, who knew and loved Cilley, few political outcomes of importance followed. Neither did the culture of Congress change much: members still dueled, still carried pistols, and still threatened to kill one another. What made the caning of Charles Sumner different?¹

One answer is the sensational details of the attack itself. Sumner was unarmed and posed no physical threat to Brooks. The caning took place in the Senate chamber, in broad daylight, and outside of the usual patterns that governed affairs of honor. Also, it came in response to a speech made by Sumner in open debate, a supposedly protected forum for the words of public men. Then, too, there was the clearly sectional and political divisions between the two

¹ On affairs of honor in the early Congress, see Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*. On the Cilley-Graves duel, see chapter 2.

combatants: Sumner being a northern Republican, Brooks a southern Democrat. The caning produced polarized reactions in the North, where Charles Sumner was a courageous martyr, and the South, where Preston Brooks was welcomed as a brave hero. In the months that followed, the caning of Charles Sumner solidified the nascent Republican Party, escalated the sectional rhetoric, and laid the foundation for continued violence in Washington. In a single moment, the modest act of one man caning another had altered the course of the nation.²

Another explanation for the continued significance of the caning is the critical point at which it took place and the prominence of its recipient. Generations of historians have highlighted the caning as an essential, even necessary, event in the build up to the Civil War. Recent histories of the caning have continued the trend, with new scholarship on the gendered implications of Sumner's "Crime Against Kansas" speech and the ensuing attack. One historian has found in the caning "as if in a perfect mirror, the sectional differences, differences over the idealism of abolitionism and the honor of the slaveholders, that split the nation and brought the

² The best collection of primary sources about the caning may be found in T. Lloyd Benson, *The Caning of Senator Sumner* (Belmont, Calif.: Thomson, 2004). Two new books dedicated to the caning provide helpful overviews; see William James H. Hoffer, *The Caning of Charles Sumner: Honor, Idealism, and the Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2010); and Stephen Puleo, *The Caning: The Assault That Drove America to Civil War* (Yardley, Penna.: Westholme Publishing, 2012). Other useful secondary accounts of the caning include Harold Schultz, *Nationalism and Sectionalism in South Carolina, 1852-1860* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1950), 115-121; David H. Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 2 vols. (reprint 1960, 1970; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 1:278-311; David Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), esp. 209-11; Sylvia D. Hoffert, "The Brooks-Sumner Affair: Prelude to the Civil War," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 11 (Oct. 1972): 35-40; Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1985), esp. 144-146; William E. Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, esp. 299-300; and Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 2:79-84. Three articles about the significance of the caning are also essential: on the effect of the caning on the formation of the Republican Party, see William E. Gienapp, "The Crime Against Sumner: The Caning of Charles Sumner and the Rise of the Republican Party," *Civil War History* 25, no. 3 (1979): 218-45; on the racialized implications of the caning, see Manisha Sinha, "The Caning of Charles Sumner: Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 233-62; and on the indignation meetings that followed, see Michael E. Woods, "'The Indignation of Freedom-Loving People': The Caning of Charles Sumner and Emotion in Antebellum Politics," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 3 (Spring 2011): 689-705.

war” and a “microcosm of the crisis in antebellum America.” Beyond the caning, there is Sumner himself, who pioneered anti-slavery politics in the 1840s, helped to found the Republican Party in the 1850s, and served in the Senate for nearly twenty-five years until his death in 1874.³

Although much attention has been given to Sumner and the meaning of the caning, historians have not seriously considered what part male friendship played in the onslaught. At first glance, the point may seem fairly insignificant. After all, how could Charles Sumner’s friendships have possibly mattered in precipitating a violent attack from Preston Brooks? The question of Sumner’s friendships raises related ones about his bachelorhood and relationships with women, his living arrangements in Washington, and his role as a third party senator in a body controlled by Whigs and Democrats. How did his conception of intimate male friendships

³ The single most important biography of Charles Sumner remains Donald, *Charles Sumner*. Earlier biographies of Sumner that are variously useful include Anna Laurens Dawes, *Charles Sumner* (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1892); Archibald H. Grimke, *The Life of Charles Sumner: The Scholar in Politics* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1892); Moorfield Storey, *Charles Sumner* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1900); George H. Haynes, *Charles Sumner* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1909); and Walter G. Shotwell, *Life of Charles Sumner* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1910). A review of many of these works may be found in Louis Ruchames, “Charles Sumner and American Historiography,” *Journal of Negro History* 38, no. 2 (April 1953): 139-160. Early collections of Sumner’s letters and speeches are also important, including Charles Sumner, *Works of Charles Sumner*, 15 vols. (Boston: Lee and Shephard, 1870-1883); Edward L. Pierce, ed., *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 4 vols. (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1877-1893); and the twenty-volume set, Charles Sumner, *His Complete Works*, 20 vols., intro. George Frisbie Hoar (Statesman Edition; Boston: Lee and Shephard, 1900). For reconsiderations of the caning of Sumner in the context of gendered manhood, see esp. Fawn M. Brodie, *Thaddeus Stevens: Scourge of the South* (New York: Norton, 1959), 125-127; Catherine Clinton, “Sex and the Sectional Conflict, in *Taking Off the White Gloves: Southern Women and Women Historians*, ed. Michelle Gillespie and Catherine Clinton (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1998); James C. David, “The Politics of Emasculation: The Caning of Charles Sumner and Elite Ideologies of Manhood in the Mid-Nineteenth Century United States,” *Gender and History* 19, no. 2 (Aug. 2007): 324-45; and John Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 2009), esp. xxviii and 106; and James B. Stewart, “Christian Statesmanship, Codes of Honor, and Congressional Violence: The Antislavery Travails and Triumphs of Joshua Giddings,” in *In the Shadow of Freedom*, ed. Finkelman and Kennon, 36-57. Two unpublished dissertations have advanced similar themes, see Harlan J. Gradin, ““Losing Control”: The Caning of Charles Sumner and the Breakdown of Antebellum Political Culture,” (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1991); and Kenneth A. Deitreich, “Honor, Patriarchy, and Disunion: Masculinity and the Coming of the American Civil War” (Ph.D. diss., West Virginia Univ., 2006).

affect the outcome of the many political battles of Charles Sumner's life? To understand how and why Charles Sumner stood alone politically, this chapter explores the many intimate male friendships of his early adult and later political career. In the end, the reason for his solitude has as much to do with Sumner's conceptions of male friendship as it does the practice of politics in the antebellum North.⁴

Among the earliest of these friends were the members of the Five of Club, a literary society at whose center was Sumner himself. At twenty-five, Sumner was a brooding young man, discontented with the monotony accompanying the practice of law. His fellow Five of Club members included George Stillman Hillard, Sumner's law partner and a dear friend whose own passions also headed in the direction of literature; Henry Russell Cleveland, a man Sumner thought possessed "the choicest qualities of the heart and head"; Cornelius Conway Felton, whose "constant flow of wit and kindliness" and jovial nature could turn a "table simply spread" into a "symposium"; and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who provided his residence, the Craigie

⁴ A notable exception is Frederick J. Blue, "The Poet and the Reformer: Longfellow, Sumner, and Bonds of Male Friendship, 1837-1874," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 273-97. In his biography of Sumner, David Donald often dismisses the role of friendship in Sumner's life. Indeed, Donald has not been without his critics; see Paul Goodman, "David Donald's Charles Sumner Reconsidered," *New England Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (Sept. 1964): 373-87; and Gilbert Osofsky, "Cardboard Yankee: How Not to Study the Mind of Charles Sumner," *Reviews in American History* 1, no. 4 (Dec. 1973): 595-606; and Louis Ruchames, "The Pulitzer Prize Treatment of Charles Sumner," *The Massachusetts Review* 2, no. 4 (Summer 1961): 749-69. Since Donald, a number of scholarly developments has facilitated the study of Charles Sumner. The scattered papers of Charles Sumner have been gathered, organized, and prepared as Beverly W. Palmer, ed., *The Papers of Charles Sumner* (microfilm, 88 reels, Alexandria, Va.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1988). Selections of important letters from these papers have been transcribed and published as Beverly W. Palmer, ed., *The Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, 2 vols. (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 1990). In addition to the articles and books cited above, see Bill Ledbetter, "Charles Sumner: Political Activist for the New England Transcendentalists," *The Historian* 44, no. 3 (May 1982): 347-63; Frederick J. Blue, *Charles Sumner and the Conscience of the North* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1994); Michael D. Pierson, "All Southern Society is Assailed by the Foulest Charges: Charles Sumner's 'The Crime Against Kansas' and the Escalation of Republican Antislavery Rhetoric," *New England Quarterly* 68 (1995): 531-57; and the exhaustively researched and sympathetically reconsidered biography, Anne-Marie Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner and the Legacy of the American Enlightenment, 1811-1851* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

House in Cambridge, as a meeting place for the group. When Cleveland died prematurely at age thirty-four, he was replaced by Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, whose daughter thought Charles Sumner to be his “*alter ego*, the brother of his heart.”⁵

The Five of Club was more than a fleeting literary amusement in the life of Charles Sumner. Through the Club, he formed the friendships that would provide needed personal support in the stormy years ahead. But Sumner also required other allies—from his beginnings as a Conscience Whig, his commitment to the Free Soil movement, and his final iteration as a

⁵ Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:39; Pierce, ed., *Memoir*, 1:161. Of the members of the Five of the Club, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow has been the subject of the most scholarly attention; see esp. the three-volume biography by Samuel Longfellow, *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, with Extracts from his Journals and Correspondence*, 2 vols. (Boston: Ticknor, 1886); and Samuel Longfellow, *Final Memorials of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston: Ticknor, 1887), which was later collected as volumes 12-14 of the poet's works for the Standard Library Edition published by Houghton Mifflin in 1891; Ernest Wadsworth Longfellow, *Random Memories* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1922); the first corrective biography by Lawrance Thompson, *Young Longfellow (1807-1843)* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1938); Edward Wagenknecht, *Longfellow: A Full-Length Biography* (New York: Longmans, 1955); the shorter but useful Wagenknecht, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Portrait of an American Humanist* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966); Robert L. Gale, *A Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Companion* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003); Charles C. Calhoun, *Longfellow: A Rediscovered Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004); and Christoph Irmscher, *Longfellow Redux* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2006). About the other original members (Cleveland, Hillard, and Felton), on Cleveland, see George S. Hillard, *A Selection from the Writings of Henry R. Cleveland* (privately printed, 1844); on Hillard, see Francis W. Palfrey, “Memoir of the Hon. George Stillman Hillard,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 19 (June 1882): 339-45; William W. Story, “George Stillman Hillard, In Memoriam,” in *ibid.*, 346-48; and on Felton, see Henry Barnard, “Cornelius Conway Felton,” *American Journal of Education* 10 (1861): 265-96; Hillard, “Remarks on Felton's Death,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 5 (1862): 446-57; Andrew P. Peabody, *Harvard Reminiscences* (Boston: Ticknor & Co., 1888), esp. 168-175; “Address of William Watson Goodwin,” *The Cambridge Historical Society Publications II: Proceedings, October 23, 1906-October 22, 1907* (Cambridge, Mass., 1907): 117-130; and David Wiesen, “Cornelius Felton and the Flowering of Classics in New England,” *Classical Outlook* 58 (1981-1982): 44-48. Other than Longfellow, interest in Samuel Gridley Howe has been most sustained; see Laura E. Richards, ed., *Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe*, 2 vols. (Boston: Dana Estes & Co., 1906-1909); Harold Schwartz, *Samuel Gridley Howe: Social Reformer, 1801-1876* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956); and James W. Trent, Jr., *The Manliest Man: Samuel G. Howe and the Contours of Nineteenth-Century American Reform* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2012). Other important relationships to emerge from Sumner's association with members of the Five of Club included two wives, Frances Appleton Longfellow and Julia Ward Howe; see Edward Wagenknecht, ed., *Mrs. Longfellow: Selected Letters and Journals of Fanny Appleton Longfellow* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1956); Julia Ward Howe, “The Great Agitation IV: Recollections of the Antislavery Struggle,” *The Cosmopolitan; a Monthly Illustrated Magazine* 7, no. 3 (July 1889): 278-86; and Laura E. Richards and Maud Howe Elliot, ed., *Julia Ward Howe, 1819-1910*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916), esp. 1:74.

Radical Republican—to achieve political ends. To start his career, Sumner had been firmly committed to the Union (as a result, Sumner had only loose ties with more radical abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and John Brown). By the 1840s, he had come to associate with such men as Francis Bird, Charles Francis Adams, Henry Wilson, Theodore Parker, Richard Henry Dana, Jr., Salmon P. Chase, William H. Seward, and Joshua R. Giddings, who each played a part in Sumner's growing radicalism. In the 1850s, Sumner was promoting northern political unity, peaceful separation from the South, and finally its military occupation. By the end of his career, he would emerge as perhaps the most radically iconoclastic figure of the Republican Party.⁶

⁶ On the Young (later Conscience) Whigs, see Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), esp. 226-27, 332-34; on the Free Soil Party, see Frederick J. Blue, *The Free Soilers: Third Party Politics, 1848-1854* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1973); John Mayfield, *Rehearsal for Republicanism: Free Soil and the Politics of Antislavery* (Port Washington, N.Y.: National University Publications, 1980); and Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*. The tradition of no compromise among anti-slavery crusaders is documented in Frederick J. Blue, *No Taint of Compromise: Crusaders in Antislavery Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005). Nevertheless, anti-slavery activists could also build work together remarkably well. About the alliances that led to the Free Soil Party, see Beverly Wilson Palmer, "Towards a National Antislavery Party: The Giddings-Sumner Alliance," *Ohio History* 99 (1990): 51-71; and more generally, John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004). About the notable anti-slavery activists who variously worked with Sumner, on Charles Francis Adams, see Martin B. Duberman, *Charles Francis Adams, 1807-1886* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961); on Henry Wilson, see Richard H. Abbot, *Cobbler in Congress: The Life of Henry Wilson, 1812-1875* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1972), esp. 35-45; and the three volume-set, starting with John L. Myers, *Henry Wilson and the Coming of the Civil War* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2005); on Theodore Parker, see Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), esp. 470-72; and Paul E. Teed, *A Revolutionary Conscience: Theodore Parker and Antebellum America* (Lanham, Md.: Univ. Press of America, 2012); on Richard Henry Dana, Jr., see *The Journal of Richard Henry Dana, Jr.*, 3 vols., ed. Robert F. Lucid (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968); on Salmon P. Chase, see Frederick J. Blue, *Salmon P. Chase: A Life in Politics* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1987); and John Niven, *Salmon P. Chase: A Biography* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995); on Seward, see the recent biography by Walter Stahr, *Seward: Lincoln's Indispensable Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012); and on Joshua R. Giddings, see James B. Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings and the Tactics of Radical Politics* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970). On the early radicals who would form the basis of the Republican Party, see Hans L. Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans: Lincoln's Vanguard for Racial Justice* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), esp. 34-102; and Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, esp. 189-238. On the differences between Sumner and the Garrisonians, see W. Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy*

When he entered the Senate in 1851, Charles Sumner loathed everything about Washington politics and capital society. In this early period, Sumner still relied heavily on the counsel of his confidants in the Boston intellectual community. Yet the cordiality of the Senate and the uncertainty of his own views led him to establish friendships with other congressmen, including southern members. As he grew more radical and was excluded from the polite society of the capital, Sumner began to change his ideas about manhood, too. He shifted from the genteel manhood that had characterized his earliest associations with his friends in the Five of Club toward a more aggressively articulated form of manhood that required the ability to attack enemies and defend moral values and principles. When Charles Sumner delivered his sensational “Crime Against Kansas” speech in May 1856, he proclaimed not only his willingness to stand against the threats posed by slavery’s expansion into the territories, but to break with many of his former Boston compatriots. In the years after the caning, he suffered greatly: from the physical and mental anguish of the wounds inflicted upon him, from the loss of even more of his dearest friends, and from his union in a hasty marriage. Upon his deathbed, with his political views discredited by nearly everyone, Charles Sumner was surrounded by many onlookers, but not a single intimate friend.⁷

in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2013). For the long tradition of violence in antislavery activity and esp. about Giddings, see James B. Stewart, “Joshua Giddings, Antislavery Violence, and Congressional Politics of Honor,” in *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America*, ed. John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1999): 167-192; and James B. Stewart, *Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2008), esp. 113-226.

⁷ On Sumner’s use of rhetoric, see Michael W. Pfau, “Time, Tropes, and Textuality: Reading Republicanism in Charles Sumner’s “Crime Against Kansas,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 385-413.

The Five of Club

By the close of the second war for independence with Great Britain, the city of Boston had long since lost its starring role as the nation's commercial hub and had become a marginal seaport in an economically moribund New England. Likewise, Boston had changed politically from a hotbed for revolutionary thought to a staunch bastion of Federalism. In the same stew of cultural conservatism that eventually produced the famous Boston Brahmins, the city had nevertheless begun to move in the direction of future liberalism. The near universal commitment to primary education, the fertile intellectual culture of Harvard College for the region's rising sons, and the founding of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences all boded well for the up-and-coming "Athens of America." By the start of hostilities in 1861, the city had reclaimed its spot as a commercial and political center, as a major hub for textile manufacturing, and as the beehive of abolitionist thought and political antislavery.⁸

Charles Sumner was born in 1811 during this transitional moment of Boston's history. He was the first son of Charles Pinckney Sumner and Relief Jacob Sumner. The newborn's father had studied law and counted Joseph Story, then a new associate justice of the Supreme Court, among his friends. In 1825, he became the Grand Sheriff of Suffolk County. In that capacity, Charles Pinckney Sumner opposed conspiratorial groups, including the Order of Free and Accept Masons, and "faction" more generally. "Plow not in the field of faction," the elder

⁸ On Boston's commercial importance in the colonial period, see Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986); on the beginning of Brahmin culture in the area of music, see Michael Broyles, *Music of the Highest Class: Elitism and Populism in Antebellum Boston* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1992); on the labor question in antebellum Boston, see David A. Zonderman, *Uneasy Allies: Working for Labor Reform in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2011); and on abolitionism in Boston, Albert J. Von Frank, *The Trials of Anthony Burns: Freedom and Slavery in Emerson's Boston* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998). About the later nineteenth-century, see Stephen Puleo, *A City So Grand: The Rise of an American Metropolis, Boston 1850-1900* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010).

Sumner had once written, for it “yields thorns & thistles & weeds & briars in rank abundance.” For Charles Pinckney Sumner, the anti-masonic cause extended more broadly to include a fight against a shadowy “Slave Power.” Over time, Charles Sumner himself would extend his father’s views and find a generalized conspiracy in the highest levels of government.⁹

The young Charles grew up in a large family, with nine children in total. Never close with his emotionally distant father, Charles became attached to his mother and aunts. He obtained his early education from his Aunt Hannah, at the dame school that she ran from the top floor of the family’s house. From an early age, Sumner turned to the bookish pursuit of his studies rather than the frivolities of youthful friendships. Tall and awkward as a child, the young Sumner’s friends called him “gawky Sumner.” As a youth, he attended Boston’s prestigious Latin School, followed closely by admission to Harvard College in 1826.¹⁰

Looking back at his life in 1851, Sumner declared, “Among my chief delights have been my friends.” As a student at Harvard College, Sumner formed intimate male friendships for the first time. He participated in literary associations with other young men, becoming a member of the Hasty Puddings Club, where he played the part of a mock lawyer. With eight other students, Sumner inaugurated a secret literary society called “the Nine.” Stubbornly partial to the buff-colored waistcoats and cravats fashionable in those days, he was disciplined on multiple occasions for his sartorial choices. The young Sumner was also a talker; his classmates provided

⁹ “Miscellany Notebook,” Charles Pinckney Sumner Papers, box 2, MHS. On Charles Pinckney Sumner’s commitment to antislavery politics, see William Preston Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party in the United States, 1826-1843* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1983), esp. 18. On the concept of the slave power, see esp. Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Univ. of Louisiana Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Pierce, ed., *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 1:1-3; Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 12-28; and Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:3-21. Although a prolific writer and a conscientious editor of his own work, Sumner never published an autobiography, though he did prepare fifteen pages of autobiographical notes; see “Autobiographical Notes” [n.p., 1851?], in Palfrey Family Papers, 1713-1915 [bMS Am 1704.15 (74)], HUL.

him a fitting nickname: the “Chatterbox.” Although Sumner most naturally thrived among the solitude of books, the sociality of his classmates left a lasting impression. In the summer of 1829, after his graduation from Harvard College, Sumner toured much of New England by foot. The trip had done nothing to diminish his affections for his former classmates. To Charlemagne Tower, in December 1830, he declared his mind to be “still full of those feelings of affection which bound me to the place and the friends I there enjoyed.”¹¹

In the years after graduation, close male friendships did not lose their prominence in Sumner’s life. While studying law under Judge Story, Sumner became closely attached to several colleagues, including John Ashmun (for whom Sumner sat vigil on the latter’s deathbed) and Simon Greenleaf, a young lawyer from Maine. Over time, Sumner and Story became even closer, with the pupil attaching himself to his mentor with near devotion. In the Ciceronian tradition of legal scholarship, Sumner became something of a son to the judge (an ironic development, given Sumner’s strained relationship with his father, himself a friend of Story’s). The son of the jurist, William Wetmore Story, remembered that his relationship with Sumner was almost that of one brother to another.¹²

¹¹ “Autobiographical Notes,” HUL; Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 32-33, 38; Charles Sumner to Charlemagne Tower, Sept. 27, 1830, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 65/004 (see also partial transcript in *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Pierce, 1:80-82). On Harvard College during this period, see Josiah Quincy, *The History of Harvard University* (Cambridge, Mass.: J. Owen, 1840); Arthur S. Pier, *The Story of Harvard* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co, 1913), 125; Ronald Story, *Harvard & the Boston Upper Class: The Forging of an Aristocracy* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1980); and Samuel E. Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard, 1636-1936* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986); for two intriguing studies of manhood and sexuality at Harvard in the era after the Civil War, see Kim Townsend, *Manhood at Harvard: William James and Others* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998); and Douglass Shand-Tucci, *The Crimson Letter: Harvard, Homosexuality, and the Shaping of American Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003). On the importance of nicknames in politics, see Andrew W. Robertson, *The Language of Democracy: Political Rhetoric in the United States and Britain, 1790-1900* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995), 72. The other members of “the Nine” were Barzillai Frost, Jonathan French Stearns, John White Browne, Charlemagne Tower, and Thomas Hopkinson (called “Hop” by his compatriots).

¹² Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 56-57, 347fn45; William W. Story, *Life and Letters of Joseph Story, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, and Dane Professor of Law at Harvard*

From the warm embrace of Judge Story and his family, Sumner struck out on his own legal practice in 1833. For a partner, he found George S. Hillard, who had been a year older than him at Harvard Law School, and a rising star in his own right. Their office at Four Court Street became not only a space for work, but, for a time, Sumner's residence as well. Hillard recalled the residence fondly as "our cool and pleasant office," matched equally by the "quiet and cultivated friends" who visited them there. Through this connection to Hillard at Four Court Street, Sumner found other associations with male friends. Through Richard Peter, Sumner was introduced to the noted legal theorist and educator Francis Lieber. While serving as a lecturer at the Harvard Law School, Sumner met Cornelius C. Felton, a professor of Greek at Harvard College and a future president of the same. To this man possessed of the "feminine traits of sweetness and purity," Sumner felt a warm, though not lifelong, attachment. The same could be said of Henry R. Cleveland, a former professor of literature at the college and a budding writer. As with many young intellectuals of this period, the young Bostonians also shared aspirations toward all things English, and European more generally.¹³

Although he could claim many common academic interests with these new friends, Sumner found an even better intellectual companion when Fenton introduced him to Henry W. Longfellow—a graduate of Bowdoin College and a classmate of Franklin Pierce and Nathaniel

University, 2 vols. (Boston: Little & Brown, 1851), 2:38-39. On the transatlantic friendship of Sumner and William W. Story, see Andrew F. Rolle, "A Friendship Across the Atlantic: Charles Sumner and William Story," *American Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1959): 40-57.

¹³ Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 60; George Hillard to Charles Sumner, July 4, 1836, quoted in *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Pierce, 1:147fn3 (original letter unavailable); "Remarks on Felton's Death," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 453; On Sumner's relationship with Francis Lieber, see Frank B. Freidel, "Francis Lieber, Charles Sumner, and Slavery," *Journal of Southern History* 9, no. 1 (Feb. 1943): 75-93; Freidel, *Francis Lieber, Nineteenth-Century Liberal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 1947), esp. 109-110, 141-142, and 201-02; and Michael O'Brien, "The Stranger in the South," in *Francis Lieber and the Culture of the Mind*, ed. Charles R. Mack and Henry H. Lesesne (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 2005), 33-41. About the Club members interests and pretensions towards Europe, see Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008), esp. 251-54; and Story, *Harvard & the Boston Upper Class*, 127.

Hawthorne—in 1835. Their mutual acquaintance was furthered in December 1836, when the latter returned from a year’s study in Europe to accept the position of Smith Professor of Languages at Harvard College. In 1837, Sumner left Boston to travel in Europe, touring England and France for the first, though not the last, time in his life. Along the way, Sumner formed a number of close male friendships: in England with Richard Cobden and George Howard (Lord Morpeth), and in Italy with George Washington Greene—to whom Longfellow had introduced Sumner—and the southern poet Richard Henry Wilde. From abroad, Sumner and Longfellow exchanged frequent letters, including one note in which the poet longed for a transcendent encounter in which “my soul will rejoice at your coming and go out to meet you.” When Longfellow went abroad five years later, Sumner felt “desolate” in the absence of his friend. Of all his many friends, Longfellow proved the most enduring.¹⁴

During the same period, the five young friends—Sumner, Longfellow, Felton, Cleveland, and Hillard—began to meet on a weekly basis, usually on Saturday afternoons. Modeled after the literary societies that the young men had known at Harvard and Bowdoin Colleges, the group typically discussed new books, their own scholarly research, and expectations for further travel and study in Europe. With tongue firmly in cheek, they called their group the Five of Club. Each member soon received his own nickname: Henry Cleveland transformed into “Hal,”

¹⁴ Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 86, 105; Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:39; Frank P. Stearns, *Cambridge Sketches* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1905), 63-64; Henry W. Longfellow to Charles Sumner, April 20, 1838, *Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Hilen, 2:73-74; Charles Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, April 23, [1842], *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 66/277. On the friendship of Sumner and Richard Henry Wilde, see Edward L. Tucker, “Charles Sumner and Richard Henry Wilde,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (Sept. 1965): 320-23; on Longfellow’s introduction of Sumner to Greene, who served as consul in Rome, see Henry W. Longfellow to George W. Greene, Aug. 6, 1838, *Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Hilen, 2:91-95; and Charles Sumner to George W. Greene, Mar. 31, 1843, Charles Sumner Letters to George Washington Greene [bMS Am 1107 (7)], HUL. Greene, who never married, remained an intimate friend of Longfellow’s until his final days; see Hilen, ed., *Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, 3:10; Gale, *A Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Companion*, 96-98; and Calhoun, *Longfellow*, 247-48. On the “oratorical culture” of the academic profession of literature in Longfellow’s time, see Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (reprint, 1987; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), esp. 36-51.

Cornelius Felton became “Corny,” Henry Longfellow, considerably shorter than his fellows, was given the ironic abbreviation of “Longo,” and Charles Sumner became the affectionate “Charly” (after his trip to Europe, he acquired the more imperious title of “Don Carlos”). As Sumner’s earliest biographer wrote, the fellowship “revealed as friends do not often reveal, their inner life to each other.” Others were less kind; local newspapers referred derisively to them as “The Mutual Admiration Society.”¹⁵

When the Five of Club first began to meet, four of the five men shared the additional commonality of their unmarried status. In 1838, Felton and Cleveland each married (Hillard was already married, though unhappily). With three of the five wedded, the pressure mounted for Longfellow and Sumner to do the same. But both men were to find no easy path toward matrimony. Longfellow had been made a widower in 1836, following the death of his wife Mary Storer Potter. In the next year, the young professor began his courtship of Francis Appleton (who went by Fanny), the daughter of the wealthy Boston merchant Nathaniel Appleton. In 1837, at the beginning of the process, Club member Hillard wrote Longfellow: “I delight to see you keeping up so stout a heart for the resolve to conquer is half the battle in love as well as war.” Sumner was more miffed than supportive: “I am as much surprised that she fails to love, as that you continue to love.”¹⁶

Longfellow spent the next seven years in an excruciating courtship. During that time, Sumner tried to introduce the brooding poet to other women. In Philadelphia, Sumner wrote in a letter to his law partner Hillard, “We are in successful experiment here. Three or four

¹⁵ Pierce, ed., *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 1:161-162; Longfellow, *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, 1:243-44. By the 1830s, Sumner had also become a member of the Boston Athenaeum.

¹⁶ George S. Hillard to Henry W. Longfellow, Dec. 24, 1837, Letters to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow [bMS Am 1340.2 (2733)], HUL (see also partial transcript in Thompson, *Young Longfellow*, 258); Charles Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, Nov. 10, 1839, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 66/008.

engagements for every evening; beautiful virgins and wives, beautiful women, who have made the vow...Longfellow actually lost his appetite by sitting on the side of a most beautiful girl at dinner--the belle of Philad^a.” Finally, on July 13, 1843, a Thursday, Longfellow married Fanny Appleton. By her marriage to Longfellow, Appleton also committed herself to the poet’s friends. By the Tuesday after her wedding, the new Mrs. Longfellow wrote to her father: “Felton and Sumner dined with us on Tuesday and Hillard passed the evening, and very agreeable they all were.” A year later, when the Longfellows decided to spend their first vacation as newlyweds in Europe, they invited Sumner to join them for the entirety of the trip (an offer that he politely declined).¹⁷

Sumner might very well have joined the Longfellows in Europe, a place with which he became familiar during the course of 1837 to 1838. In Paris, Sumner kept a journal of his many activities, which included visits to the opera, the theater, and museums. At a lecture at the Sorbonne in January 1838, Sumner came to the realization for perhaps the first time that equality among the races was indeed possible. Observing a group of blacks “dressed quite *à la mode*,” Sumner observed: “It must be then that the distance between free blacks and whites among us is derived from education, and does not exist in the nature of things.” From his time in Paris, too, Sumner learned to appreciate the fineries of French cuisine, a preference that would carry greater weight in the years ahead.¹⁸

Once returned from Europe, Sumner continued to meet young women of marriageable age on numerous occasions. But unlike Longfellow’s dogged pursuit of Fanny Appleton,

¹⁷ Charles Sumner to George S. Hillard, Jan. 29, 1841, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 62/472; Frances Appleton to Nathan Appleton, July 20, 1843, quoted in *Mrs. Longfellow*, ed. Wagenknecht, 88.

¹⁸ Pierce, ed., *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 196-203, 241-42; Charles Sumner to Joseph Story, Feb. 7, 1838, Sumner to George S. Hillard, Mar. 8, 1838, and Sumner to Henry R. Cleveland, April 14, 1838, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:36-43.

Sumner's courtships never amounted to any serious romance. As an example, Wendell Phillips, a former classmate at Harvard Law School, approached Sumner about joining their mutual acquaintance James Alvord for a carriage ride in the country. Sumner naturally agreed, especially since he considered Alvord to be one of his "boys." When Sumner learned that his primary reason for going was to entertain Ann Terry Greene, a young lady accompanying the group, he quickly demurred. As it was, Sumner's loss was Phillip's gain, for he married Greene not long after that scenic ride. In another instance, Sumner described meeting the "Trinity of Bond St.," by which he meant the three sisters: Julia, Louisa, and Anne Eliza Ward. Sumner thought Anne Eliza Ward to possess "all the sweetness, & sensibility of Fanny Appleton, without that stateliness which bars approach & those gleams, which make you shiver, while you admire their brightness." Here again, Sumner never acted upon the attraction to Anne Eliza Ward, who soon thereafter married another man. To Club member Henry Cleveland in 1838, Sumner admitted: "I doubt & feel more every day, that I am to live a *bachelor*."¹⁹

During the early 1840s, Sumner had become close to Samuel Gridley Howe (called "Chev" by his closest friends), the superintendent of the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston. The two had first met by chance, when Sumner's rash participation in the Broad Street Riot of 1837 caused him a serious head injury (Dr. Howe had ministered to the wounded civilian). Ten years older than Sumner, Howe was also a bachelor, a shared condition that afforded the two men an unexpected dose of happiness. About Howe, Sumner beamed to Francis Lieber:

¹⁹ Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 80-81; Charles Sumner to George Putnam, April 1848, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 63/245; "Autobiographical Notes," HUL; Pierce, ed., *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 1:163; Charles Sumner to Henry R. Cleveland, April 14, 1838, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 65/409. Louisa Ward married Thomas Crawford in 1844, while Anne Eliza Ward married a Frenchman, Adolphe Mailliard, and eventually moved to California. For a description of the Ward sisters, see Charles Sumner to Francis Lieber, Dec. 8, 1842, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:122-123; about the Wards more generally, see Louise H. Tharp, *Three Saints and a Sinner* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1956), 80-91

“Bachelors both, we ride and drive together, and pass our evenings, far into the watches of the night, in free and warm communion.” For his part, Howe remembered vividly how Sumner used to spend the evening, sitting “his straps unbuttoned, his waistband also, his feet in my red slippers, a glass of orvietto in his hands, his sweet smile on lips.” In the romantic language of intimate male friendship, Howe wrote in one letter: “I love you Sumner, & am only vexed with you because you will not love yourself a little more.” In this intimacy with Sumner, Howe was not unlike Longfellow. But unlike the poet, Howe could also be quite politically engaged (a decade earlier, he had fought on the side of the Greeks in their struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire). When Dr. Howe witnessed outrages in Rome later that year, he fumed to Sumner that he longed “to talk, and I would were you with me now, that I might boil over a little.”²⁰

In 1843, the same year that Longfellow married Fanny Appleton, Howe married Julia Ward, the women’s rights activist and writer. Upon news of the engagement, Sumner begrudgingly sent along a congratulatory letter to Sam Ward, brother of the bride to be, in which he expressed his fear of losing Howe: “I feel sometimes that I am about to lose a dear friend; for the intimate confidence of friendship may die away, when love usurps the breast, absorbing the whole nature of a man.” Sumner did not think such would be the fate of his friendship with Howe; instead, he hoped to have “gained a friend in Julia.” To Julia Ward herself, Sumner

²⁰ Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 154-155; Richards, ed., *Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe* 2:97-98, 122; Charles Sumner to Francis Lieber, June 3, 1841, and June 27, 1842, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 62/486, 543 (see also partial transcript in *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Pierce, 2:179-180, 212; and *ibid.*, 2:156); Samuel G. Howe to Charles Sumner, Feb. 2, [1844], reel 67/094; Samuel G. Howe to Charles Sumner, [April 1845], *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 67/272; Samuel G. Howe to Charles Sumner, Nov. 25, 1843, *ibid.*, reel 67/047 (see also partial transcript in *Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe*, ed. Richards and Sanborn, 2:143-145).

offered only the briefest of acknowledgments: “You have accepted my dear Howe as your lover.” The tension between friend and wife would continue in the years ahead.²¹

On New Year’s Eve 1843, Sumner found himself in a melancholy mood. To Howe he reflected: “An eventful year has closed—a year which has witnessed yr. engagt., marriage, & happy travels—which has witnessed the revival of long buried hopes in Longfellow, his engagt. Marriage, & establishment in a happy home.” The “happy home” that Sumner envisioned also caused Sumner to admit: “I see before you a beautiful career, which fills me with envy—a fireside sacred to domestic love, constant & increasing usefulness, the recognition of yr name & services by the world, & the blessings of all good men upon yr head.” Sumner and Howe continued to correspond regularly in the months ahead, remaining so close that Julia Ward became observably incensed. At her wedding celebration, she was said to have surreptitiously slipped silverware into Sumner’s coat pockets and accused him, however playfully, of pilfering from her bridal gifts. In another moment of a more genuine dismay, the new Mrs. Howe chastised her husband for writing too frequently to him in the weeks following their wedding, huffing that Howe should have taken Sumner as his bride instead.²²

The disconsolation brought by his closest friends’ marriages and his own failed romantic pursuits was worsened by the death of Henry Cleveland in 1844. In the wake of this loss, Sumner and Howe became noticeably closer. Hillard thought that Sumner was “quite in love with Howe and spends so much time with him that I begin to feel the shooting pains of

²¹ Charles Sumner to Samuel Ward, Feb. 21, 1843, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, reel 66/426; Sumner to Julia Ward Howe, Feb. 21, 1843, *ibid.*, reel 03/440 (see also transcript in *Julia Ward Howe*, ed. Richards and Elliot, 1:75-76).

²² Charles Sumner to Samuel G. Howe, December 31, 1843, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:134-136; Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:91; Samuel G. Howe to Charles Sumner, September 11, 1844, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 67/199. See also, Howe, “The Great Agitation,” 278; Trent, *Manliest Man*, 119-136; and Gary Williams, *Hungry Heart: The Literary Emergence of Julia Ward Howe* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1999), esp. 40-65.

jealousy.” With Samuel Howe a part of the circle, the social aspect of the Five of Club became even more prominent. Howe’s daughter Maud Howe Elliot remembered that the Club members “met often to make merry and to discuss the things of life.” Although the members “loved good cheer,” they also “observed moderation in their festivities.” Despite this good cheer, Sumner’s own bachelorhood became impossible to ignore. “My solitude & desolation become more pronounced,” he admitted to Howe. Not yet thirty-five, Sumner acted as if his bachelorhood was an inevitability. A few years later, Sumner again declared: “I am alone—more alone than ever—become more so—with little hope in this world.” The prophecy proved to be largely self-fulfilling.²³

The psychological pressures of bachelorhood were compounded by a serious physical ailment that debilitated Sumner in the summer of 1844. During his illness the other members of the Five of Club regularly appeared at his bedside. “Felton laughed jollily each day by my side, and Hillard and Longfellow, the only other persons I saw, said nothing to excite my observation,” Sumner reported to Dr. Howe in August. In the darkest hour of his illness, Sumner despaired not so much for own life, but at the thought that “no lips responsive to my own had ever said to me—‘I love you,’” this despite a “special intimacy” with Howe. Prior to the present illness, Sumner admitted to Howe that an unnamed “unhappiness” had “unmanned” him. What this emasculating “unhappiness” referred to is unclear, but his depression over his bachelorhood seems a likely explanation. Another possibility is that Sumner was coping with the realization that he was not sexually attracted to women. More than one biographer has speculated about a

²³ Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 156-159; George S. Hillard to Henry W. Longfellow, May 16, 1842, Letters to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (2733), HUL; Richards and Elliot, ed., *Julia Ward Howe*, 1:74; Pierce, ed., *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 1:161; Charles Sumner to Samuel G. Howe, Aug. 31, 1843, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, reel 62/593; Charles Sumner to Francis Lieber, Mar. 22, 1847, *ibid.*, reel 63/160.

possible same-sex orientation, though they acknowledge that acting on any such attractions would have been highly unlikely.²⁴

For a “change of air” and to improve his health, Sumner headed to Lenox in the western Berkshire Mountains. There he stayed as a guest at Highwood, the home of the wealthy New Yorker Samuel Gray Ward (a brother-in-law to Dr. Howe). Although Sumner eventually made a full recovery from his illness, the course of time was taking its toll in other ways. Upon his return from the Berkshire idyll, Sumner shifted his attention fully toward reform causes. At first, Sumner’s involvement in politics caused little controversy. After news of the annexation of Texas, Sumner delivered a blistering antiwar speech, entitled “The Grandeur of Nations,” on July 4, 1845. In the aftermath of another anti-war speech in October 1846, Sumner’s former European travel companion, Thomas Gold Appleton, had written with concern to his father: “I wish indeed Sumner could change all this wicked nonsense...but for heaven’s sake, don’t let him do himself harm while trying to help other people.” But Sumner had entered into the public arena of antislavery politics, from which there was no going back.²⁵

The Bird Club

The opposition to the extension of slavery in the territories by no means sprang up over night. As early as 1839, the Liberty Party had formed on an abolitionist, though cooperationist,

²⁴ Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 162; Charles Sumner to Samuel G. Howe, Aug. 16, 1844, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 67/190-191 (see also partial transcript in *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Pierce, 2:310-11). For a lengthy speculation about Sumner’s sexuality, see Calhoun, *Longfellow*, 136; and David McCullough, *The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 228-29.

²⁵ On the Berkshires in Sumner’s time, see Cornelia B. Gilder, *Hawthorne’s Lenox: The Tanglewood Circle* (Charleston, S.C.: History Press, 2008); and about Bostonians travels to the countryside more generally, Tamara P. Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life Among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1989). Charles Sumner to Samuel G. Howe, Sept. 13, 1844, in *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Pierce, 2:319; Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 43-44; Thomas G. Appleton to Nathan Appleton, Oct. 31, 1846, Appleton Family Papers, MHS.

platform. In the House of Representatives, John Quincy Adams and Joshua R. Giddings had struggled for six years to lift the so-called “gag rule” that banned the introduction of anti-slavery petitions, successfully restoring the right of petition in 1844. With the coming of the Mexican War in 1846, the routines of party politics were disrupted on a national scale. For northern Whigs and Democrats, the possibilities for new alliances in meaningful opposition to the extension of slavery developed for the first time. In the election of 1848, the ex-president and ex-Democrat Martin Van Buren was selected to run for president for a third try, this time under the banner of the Free Soil Party (a group that included former Liberty Party members). The forces against slavery could no longer be ignored.²⁶

In the 1840s, Charles Sumner increasingly aligned himself with political antislavery. As he became more radical in his public stances, Sumner also began to jeopardize his place in Boston society. In the 1840s, Sumner broke with his former law professor, George Ticknor Curtis, over a disagreement about his anti-slavery views. So, too, did Sumner distance himself from Francis Lieber, whose appointment at the conservative South Carolina College prevented his association with Sumner because of his radical views. Increasingly viewing himself as a “Conscience” Whig, Sumner began to dispute with the conservative “Cotton” Whigs, most notably Robert Winthrop (a descendant of the Bay Colony’s founder John Winthrop, and it shall be recalled, a proponent of shared male intimacy in his Washington living arrangements). The disagreement would prove consequential to Sumner’s career. With the death of Joseph Story in 1845, the position of Dane Professor of Law suddenly became vacant. Although the ideological

²⁶ Reinhard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2009); Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings and the Tactics of Radical Politics*, 103; William L. Miller, *Arguing about Slavery: John Quincy Adams and the Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Knopf, 1996); Beverly W. Palmer, ed., “From Small Minority to Great Cause: Letters of Charles Sumner to Salmon P. Chase,” *Ohio History* 93 (Summer-Autumn 1984): 164-183.

heir to Story and widely presumed the successor to the chair, Sumner was rejected for his impolitic views—the New York City intellectual William Kent was instead chosen for the chair. Two years later, when Kent had resigned, he confided to Francis Lieber that “it is now much evident that the conservative Corporation of the Harvard College consider Sumner in the Law-School, as unsuitable as a Bull in a china-shop.” In a moment of reflection in 1847, Sumner despaired to his brother George that his political beliefs had “cost me friendships which I valued much.”²⁷

Yet, Sumner was not finished losing friends. By the controversial election of 1848, the Five of Club itself began to feel the weight of political pressures. In time, Sumner’s views tore the Club apart at the seams. Club member Cornelius Felton had long harbored strict Whig tendencies and sided with Winthrop in the dispute over the annexation of Texas. When Sumner’s radical politics had come into direct opposition to Webster’s speech supporting the compromise measure of March 1850, Felton broke off all social relations. George Hillard drifted away from Sumner, too, though the two nominally remained friends. Longfellow tried to stay out of the political fray; to Fanny Appleton Longfellow, Sumner confided: “Believe me now, dear Fanny, as I look back upon all that has passed during the last year—groping among the wrecks of friendships that might have been argosies—I feel that I have done nothing but a duty, poorly, inadequately, but a duty which my soul told me to perform.” Only Dr. Howe sympathized fully with Sumner’s political views. While the few friendships that remained from

²⁷ Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 218; William Kent to Francis Lieber, June 15, 1847, Papers of Francis Lieber, box 15, Huntington Library; see also Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:112, 129; Charles Sumner to George Sumner, July 31, 1847, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 63/186.

his early adulthood, particularly those with Longfellow and Howe, would continue, the Five of Club had permanently adjourned.²⁸

The termination of the Five of Club allowed Sumner to turn his attention toward more overtly political causes and organizations. Since 1848, Sumner had been a regular at meetings held each Saturday at Young's Hotel in Boston. Hosted by Francis W. Bird, the group became known as the "Bird Club." Through the club, he met Henry Wilson, Edward Keyes, and James Stone; he became close to John Gorham Palfrey, the Harvard divine who had recently failed to secure election as a candidate to the House of Representative; he connected with the radical abolitionist preacher Theodore Parker; and he developed a strong connection with Charles Francis Adams, whose signet ring he would wear on the chain of his pocket watch throughout his life. Sumner also began to associate with members of the African American community in Boston, particularly with the promising young attorney Ellis Gray Loring. Samuel Howe also attended club meetings. In time, the club would pride itself on having no official rules and "nothing to hold it together but similar political and social affinities, and a common need and love of good fellowship." In spite of its avowed informality, the club was arguably one of the most influential forces in state politics by the summer of 1850. More importantly, Charles Sumner was fully radicalized and committed without trepidation to the morally righteous cause of antislavery.²⁹

²⁸ On the significance of the Free Soil Party in the election of 1848, see Rayback, *Free Soil*, esp. 247-49; Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 149-150; Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:171; Diary entry, June 12, 1846, quoted in *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Longfellow, 2:44; Charles Sumner to Frances A. Appleton, [Feb. 1848], *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 68/177-180.

²⁹ Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 241, 251, 275, 316; on the Bird Club, see Stearns, *Cambridge Sketches*, 162-165, 168, 172-174; Frank P. Stearns, *George Luther Stearns*, 156; Samuel G. Howe to John G. Palfrey, Aug. 10, [1859], Palfrey Family Papers, HUL; *Francis William Bird: A Biographical Sketch* (Boston: privately printed, 1897), 34-35; John R. McKivigan, ed., "The Reminiscences of William Wild Thayer, Boston Publisher and Abolitionist," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 103 (1991): 138-156; Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876*

Outside of the members of his Boston circle, Sumner also began a regular correspondence with a number of leading figures in the fractured antislavery movement. Through letters Sumner promoted political unity across the North. To Salmon Chase of Ohio, he wrote in 1846: "There must be very soon a new chrystallization of parties, in which there shall be one grand Northern party of Freedom. In such a party I shall hope to serve by yr side." Chase likewise hoped to create a "mutual understanding" in the upcoming election of 1848. At the Free Soil Party convention of 1848, Sumner and Chase met and enjoyed a "limited intercourse." Chase esteemed his new colleague, for whom he felt the "strongest sentiments of friendship" and asked, "Is it not Cicero, who tells us that the strongest ligament of friendship is 'idem velle et idem nolle'?" Once in Washington, Chase again expressed a strong desire to "commune" with his friends, for he could find "no man so congenial to me as yourself." The two men would share the same likes and dislikes in the years ahead, but they would not meet again until Sumner's election to the Senate in 1851.³⁰

Another antislavery congressman with whom Summer corresponded was Joshua R. Giddings, also of Ohio. Like Chase, Giddings supported Sumner's call for a "fraternization" of parties to achieve electoral success, but he only reluctantly would abandon the Whig Party. Once in Washington, Giddings opposed the selection of Cotton Whig Robert Winthrop as Speaker of the House, signaling not only his support for an antiwar and anti-slavery candidate

(Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1984), 3-7; and Myers, *Henry Wilson and the Coming of the Civil War*, 137; on Sumner's connections with the African American community in Boston, see James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), 55-56. The influence of the Bird Club on national politics remains debated; see Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, 3; and Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 222:fn93.

³⁰ Charles Sumner to Salmon P. Chase, Dec. 12, 1846, "Small Minority to Great Cause," ed. Palmer, 166; Chase to Sumner, Dec. 2, 1847, Nov. 27, 1848, Sept. 15, 1849, *Correspondence of Salmon P. Chase*, ed. Niven, 2:160, 198, 256 (as the editor notes, the phrase, which may be translated, "to like and dislike the same thing," is not from Cicero but from Sallust).

but also his eventual break with the Whig Party. In this move Sumner, along with Charles Francis Adams and other Bird Club members, supported the Ohio representative. Along with the Conscious Whig John G. Palfrey, Sumner thought Giddings “our only hope & anchor in Washington.” Thus, from Boston, the small circle of friends was adding new members, if at a distance.³¹

At the same time, a new form of coalition politics developed in Massachusetts, one in which Free Soilers and Democrats combined to control state offices and, by extension, the selection of senators. The key figure in the rise of antislavery ideology to mainstream power was Henry Wilson. In 1853, Wilson engineered his own election to the Senate, a position he would hold with Sumner until after the war. But Wilson and Sumner could never overcome basic differences about the nature of politics. Whereas Wilson was a unifier who worked behind the scenes to effect a grand political agenda, Sumner was a principled idealist who disdained compromise (nor for that matter, did he endear himself to the abolitionist communities in the capital). Both antislavery at the core, their differences foreshadowed wider splits in the future Republican Party in the years ahead.³²

Sumner’s turn to political activism also presaged future involvement at the highest of levels. The sudden death of President Zachary Taylor in July 1850 unexpectedly opened the door. The new president, Millard Fillmore, chose Senator Daniel Webster to become the next secretary of state. Suddenly, the Massachusetts Legislature faced the task of filling a vacancy left by the appointment. Through the coalition of Free Soilers and office-seeking Democrats,

³¹ Charles Sumner to Joshua R. Giddings, Feb. 1, Dec. 1, 1847, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 063/146, 068/065; Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings and the Tactics of Radical Politics*, 126, 135; useful transcriptions of letters may also be found in Palmer, “Toward a National Antislavery Party.” On Palfrey’s opposition to Winthrop, see Frank O. Gatell, “Palfrey’s Vote, The Conscience Whigs, and the Election of Speaker Winthrop,” *New England Quarterly* 31 (June 1958): 218-31.

³² On the divisions within Massachusetts politics, Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, esp. 24-53

Charles Sumner was nominated (led by the efforts of fellow Bird Club member James Stone) and successfully selected to fill the Senate seat so long held by the “Godlike Daniel” in April 1851 (thanks in large part to the politicking of Bird Club member Henry Wilson). On the day of his departure for Washington in November, Sumner thrice shed tears, first to Longfellow, second to Howe, and finally with his mother and siblings at their respective moments of separation. Whether these distant friendships would provide the necessary emotional support to wage the ferocious battles that lay ahead remained unknown.³³

Some Other Sphere

Washington City still had a sense of calm about it in 1851. The mediated peace that followed the tumultuous events of the previous year led many to believe that an ultimate compromise had been reached on the slavery question. The Nashville Convention of June 1850 had not convinced the delegates to take any unified action: the South still stood divided by the strictures of party more than section (South Carolina being a notable exception). The Whigs enjoyed the spoils of office; the Democrats planned for the upcoming showdown in the next fall’s election; and the country returned to normalcy. A freshman representative entering Congress for the upcoming meeting in 1851 could reasonably expect the session to be governed by the utmost respect for the polite decorum that had largely characterized the previous thirty years of the legislative branch.³⁴

The Senate’s newest member thus entered Washington at a time of relative quietude. Yet, from the start, Charles Sumner did not follow the usual practice of lodging at a boardinghouse or hotel with other members of the Congress. Instead, Sumner engaged Charles

³³ Taylor, *Young Charles Sumner*, 336; Charles Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, Nov. 26, 1851, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 70/057.

³⁴ David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), esp. 121-144.

Eames, his former Harvard classmate and the editor of the Washington *Union*, to locate a house that would provide a modicum of quiet from the hubbub of life in the capital. Accordingly, Sumner rented a room in a house owned by one Mr. Gardiner on New York Avenue, between Fourteenth and Fifteenth streets. He was pleased with the arrangement. To his brother George, he boasted, “I have a sitting-room & bed-room, well-appointed for Washington, retired, & yet conveniently situated. Upon the whole, I am better lodged than any member of Congress, who has not a house of his own.” In another letter, Sumner pressed his brother to stay with him at his “retired” New York Avenue house, rather than at a hotel, averring: “I think you will be comfortable at my quarters here in Washington; but do not feel constrained to them if on any ground you prefer use of the Hotel.”³⁵

Although Sumner did not live with other congressmen in a formal mess apparatus, he nevertheless gravitated toward an informal dining arrangement quickly in his first session in Washington. Here again, his choices were relatively limited by his radical anti-slavery views. Sumner avoided social intercourse with active members of Congress. To his brother George, he wrote: “Of late I have dined in a small mess, with two friends, Judge Rockwell of Conn. & Gibben, the Swedish minister, at a table by ourselves served by a French *restaurateur*.” Sumner’s choice of companions reflected his status as an outsider in Washington circles, as much as they did his personal preference for French cuisine. Sumner had met Judge Rockwell, a former Whig congressman in his state, during his summer trips to the relatively radical western Berkshires. In the minority politically, the two men likely commiserated over the conservative

³⁵ Charles Eames to Charles Sumner, Sept. 28, 1851, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 8/203; Charles Sumner to George Sumner, April 19, 1852, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 63/522; Charles Sumner to George Sumner, April 26, 1852, *ibid.*, reel 63/528.

feeling of the Cotton Whigs prevailing in Boston. Happy with Judge Rockwell and the Swedish minister, Sumner would continue to dine in this manner for the remainder of his first term.³⁶

Sumner's decision stemmed from a combination of personal and political factors. A private person who still lived in his mother's home, he preferred solitude to the boisterous conviviality of a boardinghouse. In a letter from June 1851, he revealed his distaste for what he perceived to be the coarse nature of Washington society: "My own taste would carry me away from a mess boarding-house or hotel. My European experience is too pleasantly fresh in my memory, & my long life at home with my mother, to incline me to this American system."

Barely a month into his first term, the abstemious Sumner recounted a congressional banquet that "terminated in a miserable drunken rout." Sumner complained how he was "called by vehement voices to speak," but he was "unwilling to address a company disguised by Circe." On another occasion Sumner complained to Longfellow that a society tea had been "inferior to our Boston gathering."³⁷

Beyond these personal preferences, another reason for his desire to live away from the Capitol stemmed from a near maniacal commitment to his work. More so than other members, Sumner placed Senate business over social calls every time. One contemporary remembered him as a veritable work-a-holic, staying up all night to attend to his affairs and refusing to relent from his grueling schedule for any reason. The senator was moreover "little inclined to conventional conversation with casual visitors." Although he rarely refused visitors, he would often continue working during the entirety of a visit, never once lifting his eyes from his papers. The politest of

³⁶ Charles Sumner to George Sumner, April 19, 1852, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 63/522. In another letter to his brother, Sumner remarked disgustedly of Boston: "The City is bigoted, narrow, provincial, & selfish. The country has more the spirit of the American Revolution." Charles Sumner to George Sumner, April 28, 1852, *ibid.*, reel 63/530.

³⁷ Charles Sumner to Salmon P. Chase, June 5, 1851, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 5 vols., ed. John Niven (Kent, Oh.: Kent State Univ. Press, 1993-1998), 2:316-17; Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, Dec. 28, 1851, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 70/134.

gentleman, Sumner did not swear in public and only rarely used vitriolic language among his intimates. He was, another recalled, a “a handsome man...[h]is head had the bold and upright poise of a young lion; and he had a fashion of tossing his hair from his forehead while speaking, by a motion of his head, that was very striking.” With his work keeping him perpetually busy, Sumner seemed to care less for the sociable offerings of domestic intimacy and more for the intellectual rigors of the Senate, a propensity that he had long since exhibited in his days as a failing lawyer. On multiple occasions, Sumner even allowed the press of work to take precedence over commitments to his closest friends back in Boston.³⁸

There was also a very practical political reason for his separation from other congressmen in the capital. In contrast to the living arrangements of his many future Democratic antagonists, Sumner could claim few fellow partisans as allies. Still, there were at least two northern senators with whom Sumner could have formed a strong political connection through a shared mess. The first was Salmon Portland Chase of Ohio. Chase had been among the earliest organizers of the Free Soil movement on the national level. In 1848, he had engineered the selection of Martin Van Buren as the third party’s candidate. He shared Sumner’s temperament for elite tastes and high moral principles (like Sumner, he refrained from the consumption of alcohol). Upon Sumner’s election to the Senate in 1851, Chase wrote, “Now I feel as if I had a brother--colleague--one with whom I shall sympathize and be able fully to act.” But unlike Sumner, Chase was not opposed to forming a mess, so long as it was done properly. He had spent the previous two years boarding at the spacious home of Washington anti-slavery activist Gamaliel Bailey. “I had two rooms & my own servant,” he wrote to Sumner about the previous session.

³⁸ Arnold B. Johnson, “Recollections of Charles Sumner,” *Scribner's Monthly, an Illustrated Magazine for the People* 8, no. 4 (Aug. 1874): 475-90 (quote on 477); Harriet H. Robinson, ed., “Warrington” *Pen Portraits* (Boston: Lee and Shepherd, 1877), 57. Sumner did not attend the funeral of Fanny Appleton Longfellow in 1861; see Charles Sumner to Richard H. Dana, Jr., July 18, 1861, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 75/089.

“I think a few could unite and by having a cook occupy the basement carry out your entire idea.” The arrangement never took place, but in time, the two men would become among the closest of friends and political allies.³⁹

The second man was William Henry Seward, a Conscience Whig from New York. Like Sumner and Chase, Seward had cut his political teeth in the anti-masonic movement and shared broad anti-slavery principles. In fact, Sumner had long wished to meet Seward, as he wrote in a letter from October 1851: “I have long desired to know you face to face; & I hope you will not deem me too bold, if I declare the delight with which I found, in your familiar conversation, those congenial sentiments, on things higher than party, which involve the *idem sentire de republica*, once pronounced a peculiar bond of friendship.” The “peculiar bond of friendship” only grew once the two men were serving in Washington, such that Seward, whom Sumner “like[d] much” and with whom he found “great sympathy,” was one of the few people who could mollify his lonely spirits. But unlike Sumner, Seward was happily married and a committed family man. While in Washington, he often brought along his wife, Frances Adeline Seward, and their three children. Much as he had bonded with Fanny Appleton Longfellow, Sumner possessed many similarities with Frances A. Seward, both in their shared moral principles and abolitionist politics. The two engaged in a platonic correspondence marked by mutual

³⁹ Blue, *Charles Sumner and the Conscience of the North*, 63; Blue, *Salmon P. Chase*, 79, 338fn47; Salmon P. Chase to Charles Sumner, April 28, 1851, typescript, in “Diary and Correspondence of Salmon P. Chase,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1902*, 2 vols., ed. Edward G. Bourne et al (Washington, D.C., 1903): 2:235; Chase to Sumner, June 11, 1851, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, ed. Niven, 2:317-18. On earlier efforts to form an antislavery community in antebellum Washington, see also Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington D.C., 1828-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2003); and Jonathan Earle, “Saturday Night at the Baileys’: Building an Antislavery Movement in Congress, 1838-1854,” in *In the Shadow of Freedom: The Politics of Slavery in the National Capital*, ed. Paul Finkelman and Donald R. Kennon (Athens: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2011): 83-96.

admiration and respect across gendered lines, developing what William Seward's biographer has called the "mature respect of one antislavery activist for another."⁴⁰

In his relationships with other members of Congress, Sumner at first tried to effect cordial relations, thinking perhaps to build a coalition with northern Democrats. Since he was neither a member of the Whigs nor the Democrats, the Democratic caucus seated him towards the back of the chamber. Ironically, then, Sumner was placed nearby the pro-slavery, states' rights Senator James M. Mason of Virginia and seated almost directly next to Senator Andrew P. Butler of South Carolina. Along with Robert M.T. Hunter and David R. Atchison, these men represented the very heart of the proslavery political tradition; yet, they also inclined intellectually in ways similar to the Harvard-educated lawyer. After Sumner's inaugural speech concerning intervention in the affairs of foreign nations, even the most ardent of Democrats and Whigs congratulated the man. Mason was observed to draw in Sumner to "talk on national politics." Perhaps the savvy Virginian was hoping to soften the new senator's views, even to make an ally of him. Perhaps, too, he was drawn to the handsome new representative with the polished diction of a scholar. A month later, Sumner squared off with some of the same southern Democrats who had previously congratulated him over internal improvements. In a sign of greater conflicts to come, Robert Hunter scoffed at Sumner's position's favoring federal support of railroads as a "most delightful idyl."⁴¹

That many Southerners extended Sumner a genuine cordiality should not then surprise. However, one in particular, the French-born Pierre Soulé of Louisiana, seems to have especially appealed to Sumner. A slave-holding operator of sugar plantations, Soulé became "much my

⁴⁰ Charles Sumner to William H. Seward, Oct. 22, 1851, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 70/37; Frances Seward to Charles Sumner, April 26, 1852, *ibid.*, reel 09/73; Stahr, *Seward*, 11, 19, 32-33, 135, 156. The other Free Soil senator was John Parker Hale; see chapter 2.

⁴¹ Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:209

friend,” this despite the antithetical nature of their political principles. Even as late as 1853, Sumner continued to think highly of Soulé. Although the Louisianan saw “things from a point of view very different from ours,” Sumner confided to Charles Francis Adams, the Frenchmen “[p]ersonally...awakens in me a warm friendship.” Less than a year later, Soulé would collaborate with James Buchanan, the Minister to England, and John Y. Mason, minister to France, to author the Ostend Manifesto, a document that promoted the acquisition of Cuba by the United States to ensure new markets for slaveholders. Sumner’s friendship with Soulé could hardly have been more injudicious politically for a staunch anti-slavery advocate.⁴²

What explains this cordiality with southern slaveholders? After all, the Free Soil Party that sent Sumner to Washington had firmly declared its unwillingness to compromise with pro-slavery politicians. Perhaps, as one biographer has argued, Sumner was lonely and missed his friends at home. Writing to “Dearly beloved Henry,” Sumner confided to Longfellow with unbridled emotion: “I feel heart-sick here. The Senate is a low place, with few who are capable of yielding any true sympathy to me. I wish I were in some other sphere.” While it is true that Sumner often felt alone, he also could not avoid his lifelong practice of forming intimate friendships with men whose intellectual interests held culture in high regards. Ironically, the genteel manhood of slaveholders and Democrats such as Soulé, and to a lesser extent Mason and Butler, appealed to Sumner more than the commercial crassness of most northern representatives.⁴³

⁴² Charles Sumner to Charles F. Adams, Jan. 26, 1853, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:382. On Soulé, see Arthur Freeman, “The Early Career of Pierre Soulé,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 25 (Oct. 1942): 970-1127; and John P. Moore, “Pierre Soulé: Southern Expansionist and Promoter,” *Journal of Southern History* 21 (May 1955): 203-23.

⁴³ Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:210; Charles Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, Dec. 28, 1851, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 70/134; Charles Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, Jan. 11, 1852, *ibid.*, reel 70/179.

Another explanation for Sumner's early cordiality with southern senators may be found in the congenial nature of the Senate itself. In 1851, the upper chamber of Congress was still a place where men of widely varying principles could expect to find the civility customary to statesmanship. Besides the Southerners, Sumner was warmly welcomed by Hamilton Fish, the wealthy Whig senator from New York. Likewise, Sumner received hearty compliments from many of his associates in Boston for the conciliatory tone of his initial speech and subsequent reception by other members of the Senate. Wendell Philips wrote approvingly: "Great accounts come floating here of your triumphant success in Washington, social and otherwise." Richard Henry Dana, Jr., was equally pleased, though hardly generous to his fellow Bostonians: "Your kind reception at Washington is not attributable, sure enough, to the influence of our Boston oligarchy." The editor Francis P. Blair, with whom Sumner shared a meal on Christmas Day 1851, wrote to Martin Van Buren about the new senator: "I am glad to perceive that the most uncompromising of the school such as Sumner and his friends take very serious of fraternizing fully with the Democracy."⁴⁴

A final possible reason concerns Sumner's continued interest in finding a suitable wife. While he often dismissed Washington's culture as inferior to that of Boston's in his letters to Longfellow and Howe, Sumner nevertheless did not ignore the very real possibilities of courtship and marriage presented by capital society's women. In fact, the Senate's newest bachelor made an unusual personal connection with the Senate's oldest bachelor, William Rufus King. Sumner met King's niece Catherine Parrish Ellis, and he may even have expressed an interest in marrying the widow (much as James Buchanan had done years earlier). "Mr. Sumner asked [Ellis] to marry him," Mary B. Chesnut recorded in her diary in May 1861, "I wish he had, only

⁴⁴ Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:208-09; Pierce, ed., *Memoir*, 1:263-64, 267, 272; Francis P. Blair to Martin Van Buren, Jan. 1 and 2, 1852, *The Papers of Martin Van Buren* (microfilm, 35 reels, Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1960), reel 32.

to know what he would have done with her plantation and hundreds of negroes. She is a rich widow and charming.” Sumner’s own correspondence contains only a brief mention of Ellis, in which he wrote to his brother George that Senator King’s “niece always enquires after you.” Regardless of his affections for Catherine Parrish Ellis, Charles Sumner apparently thought very highly of her uncle. “Mr. King is a little reserved but at times quite kindly,” he wrote to his brother George in 1852. After King’s election to the vice-presidency in 1852, Sumner genuinely worried for the health of the slaveholding Democrat: “It is feared that he may not live to be inaugurated. Death is thinning fast the elders of the Republic.”⁴⁵

During his first year in the Senate, Sumner had few opportunities to deliver a long speech on any important question related to slavery. In Boston, some began to wonder if he would ever make an anti-slavery speech in line with his party’s views. Dr. Howe urged Sumner to take a stronger stance, calling his initial Senate speech that of “Lawyer Sumner, Senator Sumner—not of generous, chivalrous, high-souled Charles Simmer, who went with me into the Broad Street riot, and who, *if need had been*, would have defended the women and children in the houses, by pitching their ruffianly assailants downstairs.” Charles Francis Adams disdainfully noted Sumner’s newfound easiness with the Southerners. When months later Sumner still had not taken a strong anti-slavery stance, Adams observed: “I find him more egotistical than ever, and little aware of the harsh instructions that are put upon his conduct among our friends.” The

⁴⁵ “May 9, 1861,” in *Diary of Mary Chesnut*, ed. Woodward, 59. Ten years after the fact, Chesnut may have misremembered exactly which of the two Sumners had courted Ellis, but she quickly disparaged Charles Sumner, still a bachelor: “They say *he* avoids matrimony.” Charles Sumner to George Sumner, Jan. 5, 1852, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:347; Charles Sumner to Lord Wharncliffe, Dec. 19, 1852, in *ibid.*, 1:379. Immediately before the mention of Senator King, Sumner had told of Webster’s death. Besides abolitionists and reformers, such as Dorothea Dix, Sumner began to write regularly to his colleagues’ wives Frances Seward and Julia Keen Fish, and with Fanny Eames, wife of his former classmate at Harvard College.

members of Bird Club likewise disapproved, as recorded by Adams: “Bird repeated what he had always said, that he had never favored sending Sumner.”⁴⁶

One reason for Sumner’s delay in delivering an anti-slavery speech was related to his scholarly attitude toward oratory. He was primarily a man of letters; his study contained numerous dictionaries, copies of the works of Shakespeare and Hazlitt’s collection of New England poetry—rebound twice since his college years—and an extremely well-worn copy of the Bible. Sumner favored preparing formal speeches, replete with Latin quotations and copious literary allusions. About this practice, one well-meaning friend warned that “every Latin quotation he makes costs him a friend.” Sumner’s erudite precision in language came through most forcefully in the usage of underline marks in his letters—he would sometimes use four marks for heavy emphasis—an indication of a passionate commitment that he ascribed to the meaning of words. Neither did he speak extemporaneously. He spent hours in preparing and practicing his speeches, committing them entirely to memory, often before his friend Judge Rockwell. “My central ally was Mr. Rockwell of Conn., who is a master of the subject, & who declares every where that my argt. is in all respect unanswerable,” Sumner wrote to John G. Palfrey in 1852.⁴⁷

On top of these factors, Sumner had also faced opposition from the Democratic, largely southern establishment that controlled the Senate. The guardian of slavery James M. Mason had played a part in preventing Sumner from speaking on an anti-slavery topic. “Mr. Mason says I shall not speak this session,” Sumner wrote to Edward Pierce in August 1852. “I have told him

⁴⁶ Samuel G. Howe to Charles Sumner, December 28, 1851, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 70/126 (see also partial transcript in *Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe*, ed. Richards and Sanborn, 2:360); Charles Francis Adams Diary, May 22, 1852, *Adams Family Papers* (microfilm, 608 reels; Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1954-1959), reel 72; *ibid.*, November 27, 1852, reel 73.

⁴⁷ Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:212; James W. Stone to Charles Sumner, Dec. 16, 1851, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 8/340; Charles Sumner to John G. Palfrey, Feb. 11, 1852, *ibid.*, reel 70/231.

that I will speak and he cannot prevent me.” Finally, in August 1852, Sumner delivered the first of several orations against slavery, as part of a motion to repeal the Fugitive Slave Law. Called the “Freedom National Speech,” the effort lasted four-and-one-half hours. Throughout Sumner systematically challenged every aspect of slavery’s legitimacy in Constitutional doctrine. As was his custom, the speech was replete with Latin expressions. In immediate reply, the Alabama senator Jeremiah Clemens rose to say: “The ravings of a maniac may sometimes be dangerous, but the barking of a puppy never did any harm,” while George Badger of North Carolina remarked that Sumner’s Latin quotations “were very unintelligible to most of the members of the body.” Indeed, Sumner’s words had done little to bring the Fugitive Slave Law closer to being overturned.⁴⁸

By the end of his first two years in the Senate, Charles Sumner had managed to please no one, including himself. Despite his political views to the contrary, he had also integrated himself fairly well into the mainstream two-party system that ruled the Senate. But all that would change when Congress reconvened in December 1853. In the Senate, Sumner would participate in fierce debates over whether the western territories should be organized on the basis of slavery or freedom. These debates would set the stage for the even more vitriolic debates around Kansas statehood in 1856. On both occasions, Sumner would receive threats of violence against him. Undeterred, Sumner continued to perform his duties in the way he thought to be the proper course of a man. While he could rely on the help of Seward, and later Henry Wilson, in his

⁴⁸ Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:227-37; “[Sept.] 11 Saturday,” *Journals of Richard Henry Dana, Jr.*, ed. Lucid, 2:503-04. Charles Sumner to Edward L. Pierce, Aug. 6, 1852, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 63/562 (see also partial transcript in *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Pierce, 3:292); “Diary, 1851-1858,” Sept. 11, 1852, Dana Family Papers, 1654-1950 (Vol. 158), MHS.

speeches against the Nebraska territory organization bill, on the crucial question of the organization of Kansas as a slave state, Charles Sumner would stand decidedly alone.⁴⁹

Without Regard to Personal Consequences

The congressional session of 1854 brought about a virtual revolution in Washington. With the introduction of the Nebraska territory organization bill in January, Stephen Douglas and the southern clique at F Street proposed nothing short of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the single most important measure in keeping the balance between free and slave states for over thirty years. In its place, the concept of popular sovereignty, which allowed territories to decide for themselves the question of slavery, would become the policy of the federal government. When President Pierce backed the bill as a test of party loyalty, Democrats largely fell into line. But for the Free Soil and remaining Whig opponents of slavery's expansion into the western territories, the introduction of the bill presented an unprecedented opportunity to make a stand against a proposal that fulfilled few practical necessities and stood blatantly in contradiction to every anti-slavery advocate's dearest principles.⁵⁰

Before that fateful meeting at the president's mansion that brought about the introduction of the bill in January 1854, Charles Sumner had already begun to reignite the passionate anti-slavery position that had sent him to Washington. The transition from dashing young senator who socialized with members of the opposite party to anti-social firebrand corresponded to a general weakening of his friendships with many of his old Boston associates. To one eager partisan, Sumner reported that he felt entirely "determined, if need be, to show *back-bone* to friends as well as foes." Sumner soon broke with John Palfrey over imputations that the latter

⁴⁹ Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:239-43.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 145-176.

had not been a true Free Soiler from the start. Sumner also experienced a serious disagreement with Seward over a trade bill—the two colleagues did not speak for six months. Others disparaged the senator privately, including Charles Francis Adams who thought that “Sumner’s whole political life thus far shows that he wants the main requisite, sagacity and penetration.” Though still an ally, Dr. Howe also clamored for a bold response, beseeching Sumner: “For God’s sake and man’s sake, disregard all punctilios, all ceremonies, all considerations of a momentary or conventional nature, and strike for freedom while there is yet time.” Only Longfellow provided unwavering support: “Of all my ancient comrades you alone have written me of late...no syllable from any of that circle larger or smaller, with which I was once so interwoven. Still as death—all—all, every one!” Longfellow replied with words of encouragement, but his apolitical stance could counsel Sumner only so far.⁵¹

In Washington, Sumner pieced together a semblance of a coalition to the new threat posed by Douglas and the southern establishment. He joined a number of anti-slavery congressmen, including Giddings and Chase, to issue the “Appeal of the Independent Democrats in Congress, to the People of the United States.” In the Senate, Chase was among the first to engage Stephen Douglas in a spirited debate. When Sumner’s turn came in February, he began to levy attacks in a far more energetic manner than he had in previous sessions, denouncing Douglas as “a Northern man with Southern principles.” A new anti-slavery senator also joined the fray, William P. Fessenden of Maine (who went by “Pitt” to his friends). In a notable exchange with Andrew Butler, Fessenden retorted to the judge’s threat of southern secession:

⁵¹ Charles Sumner to Granton Hopkins, Dec. 8, 1852, Autograph collection, 1679-1923, BAL; Henry Adams to Charles F. Adams, Jr., Feb. 8, 1861, *Letters of Henry Adams (1858-1891)*, ed. Worthington Ford (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), 87; Charles Francis Adams Diary, Nov. 28, 1853, *Adams Family Papers*, reel 73; Samuel G. Howe to Charles Sumner, Jan. 29, 1854, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 71/206 (see also partial transcript in *Letters and Journals of Samuel G. Howe*, ed. Richards and Sanborn, 2:398); Charles Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, Mar. 10, 1854; and Longfellow to Sumner, Mar. 13, 1854, *Letters of Longfellow*, ed. Hilen, 3:425.

“Do not delay it on my account.” A journalist reported that Butler twice “advanced toward the Senator from Maine with clenched fists and flushed face, as if to commit a personal assault....” No violence took place, but the sectional lines were becoming more firmly drawn.⁵²

When the bill passed the Senate in March, Sumner did not relent in attacking those whom he perceived to be the principal sponsors of the bill. In a speech referring to the exemplary conduct of the clergy of New England in petitioning to end slavery, Sumner declared that Douglas, Butler, and Mason, “who have been so swift with criticism and sarcasm, might profit by their example.” When Mason responded that the petition of New England clergymen was a “prostitution of their office to the embrace of political party,” Sumner argued that it was “natural, that the act you are about to commit should be attended by this congenial outrage.” Senator Atchison, sitting as President *pro tem* of the Senate, allowed the debate to continue.⁵³

The war of words continued through the remainder of the session. Douglas denounced Sumner and Chase as dangerous radicals who were “disgraceful to your State, disgraceful to your party, and disgraceful to your cause.” Judge Butler challenged Sumner whether he would legally aid the capture of fugitive slaves. In a rhetorical reply, Sumner offered a biblical quotation: “‘Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?’” The comment caused immediate outrage and provoked two days of debates. In defense of his messmate, Mason decried Sumner’s “vapid, vulgar declamation” as the words of one “whose reason is dethroned.” The southern establishment talked of expelling Sumner for perjury and treason, but such a course was not

⁵² Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:255-60; *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., appendix, 322-3; *New York Tribune*, March 7, 1854. On Fessenden’s role in the debates of spring 1854, see Michael T. Landis, “‘A Champion Had Come’: William Pitt Fessenden and the Republican Party, 1854-60,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 9, no. 3 (2008): 269-85, esp. 273-74; and Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Senator: William Pitt Fessenden and the Fight to Save the American Republic* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2011), esp. 86-95.

⁵³ *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., 1854, 275-82; “Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner Against the Repeal of the Missouri Prohibition of Slavery North of 36°30,’” February 21, 1854; “Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner on the Night of the Passage of the Kansas and Nebraska Bill,” May 12, 1854.

feasible in the divided Senate. Instead, Douglas, Butler, and Mason chose to ignore Sumner however and whenever possible. Two years later, this decision would permit Sumner to shock them beyond all boundaries of propriety.⁵⁴

The Kansas-Nebraska Act passed the House in May and became law soon thereafter. With the close of the spring session, Sumner left Washington, feeling disappointed not only over the territorial organization bill, but in his efficacy as an anti-slavery advocate. In the aftermath of the heated session, Sumner rededicated himself to the anti-slavery cause. To the radical preacher Theodore Parker, Sumner promised: “At last I see daylight. Slavery will be discussed with us as never before, and that Fugitive Bill must be nullified in the house. Peaceful legislation by our Commonwealth will do it all.” Sumner was also increasingly critical of those who did not espouse a sufficiently radical message, deploring cautious advice as the “babble always from the political rookey [*sic*] when a *man* speaks for any reform.”⁵⁵

At the same time that Sumner was advocating “peaceful legislation,” a controversy over the capture and trial of the fugitive Anthony Burns had erupted into violence in Boston. To the preacher James Freeman Clarke, Sumner predicted that “unless the North arises, & without distinction of party, forgetting the effete differences of Whig & Democrat, takes possession of the National Govt., we shall be degraded to a serfdom worse than that of Russia.” In the same letter, Sumner called for making “ineffective” the fugitive slave bill—he never referred to it as a law—in Massachusetts. With this suggestion, Sumner was deploying the very language of nullification once used by his southern enemies in the Senate. Sumner’s growing critique of political organization, as exemplified in his response to the Burns incident, also began more

⁵⁴ Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:258-63; *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Cong., 1 sess., 549-51, 557, 567-68, appendix, 309.

⁵⁵ Charles Sumner to Theodore Parker, June 7, 1854, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:411; Charles Sumner to John Weiss, Aug. 2, 1854, Autograph collection, 1679-1923, BAL.

regularly to deploy the gendered language of aggressive manhood used by those same enemies. To overcome the “effete differences” of party necessary to prevent being “degraded,” or emasculated, by the threats posed from Southern politicians, he could no longer adhere strictly to the tenets of genteel manhood.⁵⁶

Sumner’s changing conception of the proper role of manhood in politics mirrored the ongoing transformations of manhood in northern society. To start the Nineteenth Century, northern society relied upon traditional notions of patriarchy to steer the family, and by extension, the political course of the nation. The communal manhood, common to an earlier generation, soon gave way to the self-made manhood of the busily industrial North. At the core of Sumner’s changing understanding of political organization was a similar notion of a self-made manhood strong enough to accomplish the aims of moral reform, even in spite of the criticism in the press and threats of bodily harm. To Frances A. Seward, he said, “I was never for a moment disturbed” by the threat of violence, while to Longfellow he summed up his reaction to the reports: “Articles have appeared directly provocative to personal violence, & men have called on me to put me on my guard; to all which I have said this, ‘I am here to do my duty & shall continue to do it without regard to personal consequences.’” Other political friends concurred with Sumner standing strong in the face of danger. Joseph Hawley, a future governor of Connecticut, offered his services to Sumner in one letter: “I have revolvers and can use them.” Indeed, another correspondent thought the only true danger was being “false to one’s obligations.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Charles Sumner to James F. Clarke, June 10, 1854, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:412. On the Burns trial, see Frank, *Trials of Anthony Burns*, esp. 228-33.

⁵⁷ Charles Sumner to Frances A. Seward, June 17, 1854, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 71/382-83; Charles Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, June 2, 1854, *ibid.*, reel 70/335-36; Joseph R. Hawley to Charles Sumner, May 31, 1854, *ibid.*, reel 11/79; John G. Palfrey to Charles Sumner, June 1, 1854, *ibid.*, reel 79/334. For more on the transformation of manhood during in the nineteenth-century

Sumner remained unconcerned about the possibility of violence. By June 1854, he delighted in the accusations made against him. To Theodore Parker he chortled, “The howl of the press here against me has been the best homage I ever received.” Nor was he fazed by the renewed threats of physical violence, adding in his postscript: “The threats to put a bullet through my head and hang me—and mob me—have been frequent. I have always said: ‘let them come: they will find me at my post.’” To Frances Steward, Sumner acknowledged the real dangers against him, but he assuaged her fears with a suggestion of the great good such an enactment of violence upon him would do in the North: “The Administration organ tries to stir a mob against me, & [send] evil-disposed persons expressive in desire to put a bullet through my head; but I was never for a moment disturbed. At last there seems to be an awakening of the North. Good! Our little company promises to increase.” Indeed, Sumner likely agreed with a supporter who wrote, “Should you fall, you will...kindle a fire of freedom that will blaze and burn the length and breadth of the land the light of which will irradiate the farthest corners of the earth.” When combined with his religious worldview, Sumner’s attitude had become that of the willing martyr, ready to sacrifice himself for the anti-slavery cause.⁵⁸

In his new views on political organization, Sumner was finally no longer alone. An anti-Nebraska Party had formed in response to the passage of the territorial organization bill. After several failed attempts at fusion with various splinter groups, a new party emerged whose members called themselves Republicans. At the nascent party’s core were Free Soilers, Old Line Whigs, and moderate Democrats. In time, they would coalesce around the rallying cry of “Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men.” In the fall of 1855, Sumner became the first seated senator to

North, see Rotundo, *American Manhood*, esp. 1-9; and Rindfleisch, “‘What it Means to Be a Man.’” esp. 853-58.

⁵⁸ Charles Sumner to Theodore Parker, June 12, 1854, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel, 79/356; Charles Sumner to Frances Seward, June 17, 1854, *ibid.*, reel 72/382-83; Charles S. Macreading to Charles Sumner, June 2, 1854, *ibid.*, reel 11/106-107.

affiliate with the Republican Party, with Seward quick to follow. Finally back on speaking terms with Seward—thanks to the peace-keeping efforts of Thurlow Weed—Sumner wrote to his old colleague in October 1855: “I am so happy that we are at last on the same platform and in the same political pew.” Indeed, with Chase returned to become governor of Ohio, Seward would be Sumner’s primary ally and sounding board in the session ahead.⁵⁹

The Senate’s debates in the spring of 1856 sickened Sumner—not only the level of politics, but also on the gendered level of manly comportment. In a letter to abolitionist Gerrit Smith, Sumner caustically observed: “Douglas has appeared at last on the scene, & with him that vulgar swagger which ushered in the Nebraska debate. Truly—truly—this is a godless place.” To combat the “vulgar swagger” postured by Douglas and the southern establishment, Sumner turned to the major weapon in his political arsenal: words. Indeed, Sumner lamented the continued ineffectiveness of his position, especially to Chase to whom he wrote: “We all miss you—yr steady councils & yr ready voice & the strength of yr presence.” In a letter to Edward Everett Hale, he wrote, “It is clear that *this Congress* will do nothing for the benefit of Kansas. In the House we are weak; in the Senate powerless.” To the poet Longfellow, he hinted at something of the path he was about to take: “I have led a very laborious winter, much occupied in the *business* of my position—doing many things, which, it is supposed, a transcendentalist cannot do.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Trefousse, *Radical Republicans*, 66-102; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970); Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, esp. 214-23; Charles Sumner to William Henry Seward, Oct. 15, 1855, *Papers of William Henry Seward*, ed. Janice L. Budeit (microfilm, 198 reels, Woodbridge, Conn.: Research Publications, 1982), reel 49; Stahr, *Seward*, 156.

⁶⁰ Charles Sumner to Gerrit Smith, Mar. 18, 1856, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:453; Sumner to Salmon P. Chase, Feb. 26, 1856, “Small Minority to Great Cause,” ed. Palmer, 179; Sumner to Edward Everett Hale, Mar. 1, 1856, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 72/89 (note: Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:278, incorrectly cites this letter as from John P. Hale); Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, April 7, 1856, *ibid.*, reel 72/154.

Indeed, the congressional session of 1856 posed the greatest challenge that Sumner had ever faced. The admission of Kansas as a state became the major question of the day. To Theodore Parker, Sumner described the tense feelings in Washington and stated his intention to make a lasting speech before the Senate. "All things here indicate bad feelings," he wrote. "I have never seen so little intercourse and commingling among senators of opposite opinions. Seward, Wilson, and myself are the special marks of disfavor. God willing, something more shall be done to deserve this distinction." But even though Sumner understood the disdain from the other members for him, he did not think to band together formally in a boardinghouse with other Republicans. Instead, he spent much of the winter months in isolation, preparing an epic thirty-thousand-word speech to deliver during the upcoming session. He had at last turned his full attention to the great moral object before the nation.⁶¹

Without messmates and with only sporadic social calls, Sumner relied as much as possible on a distant Longfellow for the kind of emotional support he found lacking in Washington. "I think often of you," he wrote plaintively, "& long for an hour of that sweet sociality which has been always so much me." But in an ominous foreshadowing of the broken state of Sumner's body a mere month later, Longfellow was preoccupied with his son Charly, who had suffered an accident in which his "left hand was terribly shattered." To his Republican Party allies, Sumner was less emotionally open but nevertheless still showed signs of friendly affection. On the eve of his speech, Sumner confided to Chase: "I shall make the most thorough & complete speech of my life...My soul is wrung by this outrage, & I shall pour it forth" and added the combative exhortation "*Ducite ab urbe dominum!*" To Theodore Parker, he proclaimed: "I shall pronounce the most thorough Phillippic [sic] ever uttered in a legislative

⁶¹ Charles Sumner to Theodore Parker, Dec. 14, 1855, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 71/646; *Washington City Directory*, 1855.

body.” To ensure that he properly quoted all the sources he planned to consult, including Cervantes, Cicero, and Milton, Sumner had borrowed dozens of books from the Library of Congress.⁶²

Only William H. and Frances A. Seward remained his trusted allies in Washington. Prior to delivering his proposed speech in the Senate, Sumner performed a private version to the Swards at their Sixth Street residence. Both the Swards advised Sumner to tone down the more incendiary portions, notably the *ad hominem* attacks against Stephen Douglas and Judge Butler. William Seward warned him about the planned personal remarks and the “gratuitous assault against the honor of South Carolina.” Frances A. Seward likewise implored Sumner to reconsider: “I would on no account have you suppose that I objected to the general tone of all that you read...I objected only to the cutting personal sarcasm, which seldom amends, and is less frequently forgiven.” He might have profited from the example of his Free Soil colleague John Parker Hale, whose “Wrongs of Kansas” speech was at once moderate and powerful in its effect, but Sumner would not change a single word. He had spent months researching and writing his speech and several weeks memorizing its every word. Sumner alone would deliver the philippic, precisely as he had conceived it.⁶³

At one o’clock on May 18, 1856, Sumner began his speech, which he entitled the “Crime Against Kansas.” Spanning more than five hours and delivered over two days, Sumner targeted the southern establishment that he believed had conspired to bring slavery into a territory previously closed off by the Missouri Compromise. Much as he had once used his creative

⁶² Charles Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, April 7, 1856, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 72/154; Longfellow to Sumner, April 14, 1856, *Letters of Longfellow*, ed. Hilen, 3:536-37); Sumner to Salmon P. Chase, May 15, 1856, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:456; Charles Sumner to Theodore Parker, May 17, 1856, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 72/179; Receipts for Books, 1855-1857, 49, 181, LC.

⁶³ Frances A. Seward to Charles Sumner, [n.d., ca. May 20 or 21, 1856], *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 13/220-21.

powers to assign nicknames to his erstwhile companions in the Five of Club, he now turned his vast knowledge of classical texts to blast his enemies through literary allusion. He first attacked Judge Butler, a man who represented all the qualities of political friendship and southern manhood that Sumner had come to detest. Over the past two years, Sumner had observed a close friendship between the chivalric Butler and his many Senate associates, one characterized by boisterous drinking and loud condemnations of perceived social inferiors. Therefore, to attack Butler, he selected a character from literature that would invoke both the dyadic image of male friendship and the delusion of knighthood: Don Quixote. After attacking Butler's pretensions to chivalry, Sumner now overtly made his case that the actual crime against Kansas was the rape of enslaved women. Butler had chosen "a mistress to whom he has made his vows, and who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him...I mean the harlot slavery." Sumner could also not help but add a more personal insult about Butler's habit of spitting while speaking, noting the "incoherent phrases discharged the loose expectoration of his speech." For good measure, Sumner attacked South Carolina's record in the Revolutionary War, using statistics to demonstrate his view that Massachusetts had a greater claim to the spirit of the Great Cause.⁶⁴

With Judge Butler figured as Don Quixote, Sumner chose Stephen Douglas for the accompanying role of Sancho Panza. Sumner charged that the pair, "though unlike as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, yet, like this couple, sally forth together in the same adventure." If

⁶⁴ Charles Sumner, *The Crime Against Kansas; The Apologies for the Crime; The True Remedy* (Washington, D.C.: Buell & Blanchard, Printers, 1856), 5. As Pierson, "'All Southern Society Is Assailed by the Foulest Charges,'" notes, Sumner most likely delivered this printed version of the speech. Sumner had earlier used the word "expectoration" to describe the speeches of politicians in Washington; see Charles Sumner to George Sumner, Jan. 5, 1852, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 63/486. On Sumner's understanding of conspiracy in the "Crime Against Kansas" speech, see Michael W. Pfau, *The Political Style of Conspiracy: Chase, Sumner, and Lincoln* (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 2005), esp. 87-120; and on his understanding of oratory, see R. Elaine Pagel and Carl Dallinger, "Charles Sumner" in *History and Criticism of American Public Address*, 2 vols., ed. William N. Bragance (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960), 2:751-76.

Butler was the delusional Don Quixote of the southern clique centered on F Street, Douglas was “the squire of slavery, its very Sancho Panza, ready to do all its humiliating offices.” In linking Butler and Douglas, Sumner affirmed not only the popular belief that the Illinoisan had been one of the principal movers behind the Kansas-Nebraska Act, but he also laid the foundation for a more systematic attack on the male sociability of the members of the F Street mess and their allies. With Douglas, in particular, Sumner may have objected to what one historian has called the Illinoisan’s “subordinate masculinity,” which the diminutive Douglas famously embodied by sitting on other men’s laps. Unlike Sumner who despised physical contact outside his intimate circle of friends, Douglas thrived in the homosocial, fraternal world of Democratic Party politics.⁶⁵

With Don Quixote and Sancho Panza deployed as literary tropes for Sumner’s political ends, he next turned to the other messmates who had played prominent roles in the past two years. First, he called out David Atchison, as the “connecting link between the President and the border ruffian.” In Sumner’s fertile imagination, Atchison became Cataline, the conspirator against the Roman republic of old, and “like Cataline he skulked away...to join and provoke the conspirators, who at a distance awaited their congenial chief.” Equipped with the “vulgar arms of his vulgar comrades,” Atchison continued to play a leading role, no longer as the leading light of the F Street mess, but as the chief of the Border Ruffians in Kansas. In the same theme of tyranny, Sumner also decried James M. Mason, who as “author of the fugitive slave bill, has associated himself with a special act of humanity and tyranny.” Sumner also imputed that Mason had drifted from the Virginia political tradition practiced by Jefferson, a serious insult to the direct descendant and ideological heir of George Mason.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Sumner, *Crime Against Kansas*, 5; Quitt, *Stephen A. Douglas and Antebellum Democracy*, 86.

⁶⁶ Sumner, *Crime Against Kansas*, 9, 30

The southern establishment did not react kindly to Sumner's attacks. On the next day, Senators Mason and Douglas replied to Sumner's speech with blistering retorts (Butler was absent from Washington). In a knock on Sumner's constant usage of Latin phrases, James Mason was said to have remarked: "The Senator is certainly *non compos mentis*." Douglas was equally critical of Sumner's erudition. "We have had another dish of the classics served up," Douglas complained that Sumner's allusions were "drawn from those portions of the classics which all decent professors in respectable colleges cause to be suppressed, as unfit for decent young men to read." Douglas was genuinely perplexed at Sumner's motives in making so personal an attack. Was his goal to "turn the Senate into a beer garden, where Senators cannot associate on terms which ought to prevail between gentlemen" or perhaps to "provoke some of us to kick him as we would a dog in the street, that he may get sympathy upon the just chastisement?" In reply, Sumner again found an opening to knock Atchison, when he reminded Douglas in an dark prediction to "remember hereafter that the bowie-knife and bludgeon are not the proper emblems of senatorial debate." He also refused to be deterred, insulting Douglas with cutting words: "No person with the upright form of man can be allowed, without violation of all decency, to switch out his tongue the perpetual stench of offensive personality" and further derided Douglas as a "noisome, squat, and nameless animal."⁶⁷

The indignation of Mason and Douglas, and later Robert M.T. Hunter and Andrew P. Butler, stemmed not only from these overt personal attacks, but also from palpable differences in gendered conceptions of appropriate manhood. The usually non-combative Hunter had largely dismissed Sumner's speech, but he lamented that Massachusetts had passed a resolution "'approving' of Mr. Sumner's manliness and courage." Judge Butler deplored the "licentious" nature of sexual allusions and wondered how any man "not excluded from society...could obtain

⁶⁷ New York *Tribune*, May 21, 1856; *Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 1 sess., appendix, 544-47.

the consent of his own conscience to rise in the presence of a gallery of ladies and give to slavery the personification of a ‘mistress,’ and say that I loved her because she was a ‘harlot.’” Yet, Butler erred in thinking that Sumner had not been excluded from society. Partly by choice and partly through his break from the rules of decorum two years earlier, Sumner had been transformed from a refined intellectual to a combative debater who did not care for the established rules of Washington society or the Senate itself.⁶⁸

Sumner’s attack also fit into a newly escalated understanding of politics as a highly contested space conducted in both sexualized and gendered terms. In addition to the charged nature of the imagery, perhaps Butler also objected to imputations of sexual impurity from an unmarried man who espoused purity in his personal affairs. Indeed, Sumner’s bachelor status may have enabled him to take a moral high ground on questions of immoral sexual practices such as rape. Sumner thought in empathetic terms about the political process around him (“My soul bleeds for Kansas,” he wrote in one letter). He also possessed the psychic capacity to identify with the metaphorical rape of Kansas, both when the victim was gendered as a woman and when it was gendered as a man. The psychological perceptions of this latter, same-sex rape struck perhaps more closely to home. While historians have often ascribed this view to the Southerners who lashed out against their northern opponent, it applies equally well to Sumner, who stood against the southern establishment ultimately to attack his opponents’ manhood and to defend himself against the possibilities of emasculation through various forms of metaphorical rape.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 1 sess., appendix, 656, 628; for the first suggestion of a conflict over manhood, see Fawn M. Brodie, *Thaddeus Stevens: Scourge of the South* (New York: Norton, 1959), 125 and 386fn23; and subsequently, David, “The Politics of Emasculation,” 324-45.

⁶⁹ Charles Sumner to John Jay, May 21, 1856, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 72/185. Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:281fn6, found it “hard to find any reason why Sumner assailed these three senators.” On the rhetoric of insult, see Glenn Stocker, “Charles Sumner’s Rhetoric of Insult,” *The*

The immediate reaction from Sumner's closest friends was largely favorable, with Longfellow predictably calling the speech "brave and noble," while Howe likewise cheered at the courageous posture of the oratorical effort. But with the "Crime Against Kansas" speech, Sumner hoped to reach a national audience. He well knew that a multitude of newspapers around the country would print extracts, or the entirety, of his speech. Fully aware of this fact, Sumner had prepared his text highly attuned to how popular audiences would perceive it. But the reactions to the speech itself were relatively few, since those same newspapers simultaneously processed Sumner's words alongside an even more newsworthy event: the caning of Sumner by Preston Brooks.⁷⁰

In retrospect, historians have readily linked Sumner's personally charged attacks with the caning that followed. But what signs of impending danger were there in the days following Sumner's speech? As we have already seen, many colleagues in the North worried about Sumner's physical safety. Given the violent nature of the Senate in this time, Sumner must have been aware of the possibility of his words provoking a reaction. However, his disdain for the violent practices of Southerners, as witnessed in the many affairs of honor governed by the code duello, also left him ignorant of the many possible responses that followed personal insult. While Sumner may have been driven by popular motives, the *ad hominem* attacks seem more

Southern Speech Communication Journal 38 (Spring 1973): 223-34; on the gendered aspects of the speech, see also Pierson, "All Southern Society is Assailed by the Foulest Charges," 531-57; Pierson, *Free Hearts & Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003), esp. 137-138; and David, "Politics of Emasculation," 330. On the various ways in which rape and race intertwined in the Old South, see Diane M. Sommerville, *Rape & Race in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2004), esp. 19-41.

⁷⁰ On Sumner's awareness of newspapers, see Robertson, *Language of Democracy*, 84; and Lorman A. Ratner and Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., *Fanatics and Fire-eaters: Newspapers and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2003), esp. 60-70.

about personal resentment than political outcomes, including over the Nebraska bill two years earlier.⁷¹

By 1856, however, the signs portended physical danger ahead as never before. In the immediate aftermath of the speech, the manifestations of violent threats increased further still. One observer may have muttered: “That damn fool will get himself killed by some other damn fool.” Another congressman announced: “Mr. Sumner ought to be knocked down, and his face jumped into.” Yet when Henry Wilson and John A. Bingham of Ohio offered to protect Sumner, he adamantly refused to take any precautions. Sumner had long been aware of the possibility of violence, and he would not be deterred by it. In fact, he would carry this attitude forward through the next several years, even beyond the caning of 1856. To suggest that Sumner purposely tried to bring violence upon himself goes too far. But his response to previous threats of violence also suggests that he found great value in the possibility of martyrdom.⁷²

On the afternoon of May 22, 1856, Sumner was intently writing at his desk in the Senate chamber. There he was franking copies of his speech for distribution around the country. He was understandably proud of the printed pamphlet. As never before, he had delivered a speech that made serious political headway for the anti-slavery cause. With new allies possible across the North, the Republican Party might yet challenge the Slave Power in the upcoming congressional and presidential elections. In that moment of intense commitment to the cause that had been his life work for the past ten years, Sumner had not the faintest idea that his part in that

⁷¹ Frances A. Seward to Charles Sumner, [May 21, 1856], *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 13/221; Henry W. Longfellow to Charles Sumner, May 24 and 28, 1856, *Letters of Longfellow*, ed. Hilien, 3:540.

⁷² Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:286fn6. The accuracy of the quote may be questioned, since Donald draws on Milton, *Eve of Conflict*, 233, which itself relies a report made to the editor and author Donn Piatt in 1869; on Piatt, see Peter Bridges, *Donn Piatt: Gadfly of the Gilded Age* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State Univ. Press, 2012). See also *Alleged Assault upon Senator Sumner*, 66. On Bingham, see C. Russell Riggs, “The Ante-Bellum Career of John A. Bingham: A Case Study in the Coming of the Civil War” (Ph.D. diss., New York Univ., 1959), esp. 172-178.

future required him to face the most violent and traumatic event of his lifetime. In the immediate trial that awaited him, his friendships with men like Longfellow, Howe, or Seward would matter not at all. Both literally and figuratively, Charles Sumner sat completely alone.

A Barbarous Place

Trapped beneath his writing desk and caught off his guard, Charles Sumner received perhaps thirty blows from Preston Brooks, before his attacker's stick fragmented beyond further use. In the violent force of the assault, Brooks overturned Sumner's desk; drawing him by the neck, he continued his lashes over the desk in front of the senator's. The New York representatives Edwin B. Morgan and Ambrose S. Murray were engaged in conversation nearby, when they heard the commotion in the chamber. They rushed to the scene, Morgan catching Sumner from falling and Murray restraining the assailant Brooks. The pair then removed the unconscious and bleeding senator from the chamber, onto a sofa in the antechamber. A doctor, Cornelius Boyle, was summoned, who attended to the bleeding and applied two stitches to two different wounds. Senators Henry Wilson of Massachusetts and Lewis Campbell of Ohio, both friends of Sumner, arrived soon thereafter. Wilson took charge of his injured colleague, and they returned to Sumner's boardinghouse. Sumner's shirt was soaked with blood, his waistcoat and coat marked all over by spots of blood. Having regained consciousness, Sumner soon drifted into sleep. Before doing so, however, he uttered to the assembled crowd at his bedside, "I could not believe that a thing like this was possible."⁷³

⁷³ For the details of the caning from Sumner's point of view, many eyewitness accounts are helpful, among them the entirely underutilized, "Account of the Assault by Edwin B. Morgan," and three other untitled memos, in Miscellanea, M, box 17, folder M7, and the letters from Edwin B. Morgan to Henry Morgan, esp. May 23, 1856, box 4, C, letters, folder C1, in Edwin B. Morgan Papers, Wells College; the various testimony given in *Alleged Assault on Senator Sumner*; and Johnson, "Recollections of Charles Sumner," here 482.

By all accounts, Sumner recovered very slowly from the effects of the caning. In late June, he admitted that he had only penned five letters in the last month, one of which was to Longfellow. “My fingers are quite unused to the pen; but I will not let another day slide without requiring my thanks,” he wrote. More than ever, he missed his absent friends: “On my bed I have thought much of friends away & with a throbbing grateful heart.” By July, Sumner had begun to recover somewhat more, feeling “less feeble” and “less disturbed” in the head. He had also begun to return his attention to political matters, including the presidential contest in which the Republican Party campaigned on the dual atrocities of “Bleeding Kansas” and “Bleeding Sumner.” When news arrived of Buchanan’s election, Sumner likened the event to “Bunker Hill again, full of great auguries.” As a sign of support for its fallen senator, the Massachusetts legislature reelected its fallen senator without opposition. From Washington, his colleague William Pitt Fessenden wrote, “I miss you very much, my dear Sumner, and so do we all.”⁷⁴

In the years following the assault, Sumner recuperated in a variety of locations, including in the Allegheny Mountains of Pennsylvania, on the sandy beaches of New Jersey, along the wide Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris, and at home in Boston. Of all those places, none rejuvenated his spirits as did Paris. When Sumner first arrived in March 1857, he was still fairly weak, as the Boston native Thomas G. Appleton reported to his father in Boston: “Sumner is still here but not very strong. He owns to me that he suffers a great deal from his spine.” Yet,

⁷⁴ Charles Sumner to Richard H. Dana, Jr., June 23, [1856], *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:460; Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, June 13, 1856, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 072/199; Sumner to William H. Seward, [July 29, 1856], *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:464; Sumner to John Jay, Nov. 15, 1856, *ibid.*, 1:471. On Sumner’s recovery, see the description of Sumner in Thomas W. Higginson’s diary, Jan. 9, 1857, *Letters and Journals of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 1846-1906*, ed. Mary Thatcher Higginson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1921), 78; and Salmon P. Chase to Charles Sumner, May 1, 1857, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, reel 11/602; William P. Fessenden to Charles Sumner, Dec. 18, 1856, *ibid.*, reel 15/082.

Sumner kept up a busy schedule of visits to art museums, attendance at the theater, and nightly dinners out. To Dr. Howe, he reported optimistically: "My time is intensely occupied."⁷⁵

While in Paris, Sumner enjoyed a renewed attachment with Thomas G. Appleton, the brother of Frances Appleton Longfellow. The two men had first met while students at Harvard and had maintained cordial social relations through the ensuing years. During Sumner's trip overseas in the 1830s, they had enjoyed traveling together in Europe. Whereas Sumner had returned to Boston, Appleton had for the most part stayed. In time, he became an artist and art collector of some note. When they were both in Boston, the two men shared a number of social and literary connections, including membership in the Saturday Club and the Boston Athenæum. The two men were also bachelors, a fact that has caused one historian to suggest a "homosexual side" to the relationship. Such a statement merits little credence, however, when the surviving evidence of their relationship is compared to Sumner's other friendships.

Without a doubt, the two men did see each other regularly. In a letter from May 1857, Longfellow reported to Sumner: "Tom writes that he sees you often, and that you tell him all that is going on in the great world." In Sumner's diary kept during his travels in Europe in 1857, he mostly commented tersely of his encounters Appleton, commonly including the line, "Dined with Appleton." While Sumner was in Paris, the two bachelors dined together every third or fourth day, on average, sometimes with others, sometimes by themselves. But when compared to his friendship with Longfellow, Sumner shared no great intimacy with Thomas Appleton. Their friendship was characterized more by the friendly propinquity of Americans abroad than of the kind of the deep emotional bonds that Sumner cherished with Longfellow or Howe.

Appleton returned to Boston for the summer, staying with the Longfellows at Nahant. Sumner

⁷⁵ Thomas G. Appleton to Nathan Appleton, May 24, 1857, Appleton Papers, MHS; Charles Sumner to Samuel G. Howe, April 23, 1857, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:475-77; McCullough, *Greater Journey*, 227.

continued in Paris through the fall, and only when the weather turned colder did he return to Boston in November 1857.⁷⁶

Between 1856 and 1859, Sumner did not spend very much time in Washington, his empty chair a visual reminder of the caning. On several occasions, he attempted to resume his seat in the Senate. Each time, however, he found the duties of office to be too taxing. “Sumner has been here several times,” Richard H. Dana recorded in his diary. “He is not yet recovered, & his physicians tell him that a year more is necessary to prevent his present condition becoming chronic.” What was wrong? The reports of physicians declared Sumner to be in perfect physical health, and on the surface level, he appeared well enough; yet, beneath the skin he continued to suffer, possibly from the condition today known as post-traumatic stress disorder. Soon enough, accusations that he was shamming emerged, though historians have largely dismissed these claims.⁷⁷

Finally, in early December 1859, Sumner managed to return full-time to the Senate. His northern colleagues eagerly awaited his return. James W. Grimes of Iowa observed: “Mr. Sumner appeared in his seat yesterday, looking in vigorous health. We expect to hear from him in a great speech during the session.” As before, Sumner continued to live by himself in a boardinghouse, and in an historical irony, just steps away from where his political enemies had once plotted to destroy him. But quite differently from his first term of office, Sumner might

⁷⁶ Henry W. Longfellow to Charles Sumner, May 19, 1857, *Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Hilen, 4:35-36; “Diary of Charles Sumner,” Pierce, ed., *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, 3:529-49; see also, McCullough, *Greater Journey*, 228-29. About Appleton, see also Susan Hale, *Life and Letters of Thomas Gold Appleton* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1885); Patricia B. Bois, “Thomas Gold Appleton (1812-1884), Artist and Patron” (M.A. thesis, Univ. of Delaware, 1972); and Louise H. Tharp, *The Appletons of Beacon Hill* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1973).

⁷⁷ “Dec. 6, Sunday,” *Journals of Richard Henry Dana, Jr.*, ed. Lucid, 2:832; On the question of shamming, see Laura A. White, “Was Charles Sumner Shamming, 1856-1859?,” *New England Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (Sept. 1960): 291-324; and Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:322-26, who argues variously for an initial bout of septic shock, followed by many years of post-traumatic stress disorder. His conclusion has been widely accepted by historians.

expect to count on a number of Republican Party allies, including his old allies Seward, Fessenden, and Grimes. In addition, he was now a marked man among Republican circles. Newer representatives would offer their services to the near martyred senator.⁷⁸

Although the focus of the nation had moved on from the caning, he still attracted the notice of southern observers, including the agriculturalist and fire-eater Edmund Ruffin who recorded in his diary that the “notorious Sumner has resumed his seat.” Sumner defended Thaddeus Hyatt of New York for refusing to participate in the Senate’s investigation of John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry, a committee headed by James M. Mason of Virginia. When Sumner spoke on the admission of Kansas to the Union in June 1860, his old enemies Mason and Douglas once again appeared visibly disturbed. Observing the policy of biting their respective tongues around Sumner, Mason and Douglas seem to have done exactly that. As recorded by George Sumner in a letter to Longfellow: “Douglas squirmed restlessly in his seat, and Mason exhibited his exasperation by chewing an immense quantity of tobacco, so that by the end of the oration, his quids lay around him in a semicircle.”⁷⁹

With his return to Washington also came renewed threats, including one from a “Southern Mazzini,” that worried his friends and colleagues. One from a group of four Virginians promised violence. Sumner again shrugged at the prospect of violence, but no longer would his friends permit the senator to proceed without protection. His private secretary Arnold B. Johnson joined several northern congressmen, including Henry Wilson, John Sherman, John

⁷⁸ *Washington City Directory*, 1858, 1860, 1862. After 1862, congressional addresses were not published, perhaps in fear of violent attack by enemies during wartime. James W. Grimes to Elizabeth Neally Grimes, Nov. 30, 1859, quoted in William Salter, *The Life of James W. Grimes, Governor of Iowa, 1854-1858; A Senator of the United States, 1859-1869* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1876), 121. On Grimes, see Robert J. Cook, “Grimes, James W.,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Iowa*, ed. David Hudson, Marvin Bergman, and Loren Horton (Ames: University Press of Iowa, 2009), 196-199.

⁷⁹ On Sumner’s return to Washington, “Dec. 14, 1859,” in *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, ed. Scarborough, 1:380; Sumner, *Works*, 4:426-34; George Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, [June 1860], Letters to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow [bMS Am 1340.2(5395)], HUL.

Dawes, and Anson Burlingame, to organize an overnight vigil against unwanted visitors to the senator's home. The security detail grew to include August Wattles, a fellow partisan of John Brown in Kansas. From Longfellow, he received the fretting note: "I am sick of our dreary American politics, and hate to see you dragged any longer through such mire!" After years abroad, the capital repulsed Sumner as never before. "This is a barbarous place," he wrote to a colleague. "The slave-masters seem to me more than ever *barbarians*—in manner, conversation, speeches, conduct, principles, life. All things indicate a crisis."⁸⁰

Fittingly then, Sumner prepared his "The Barbarism of Slavery" speech, a title borrowed from Representative Owen Lovejoy's speech of the same name. On June 4, 1860, Sumner entered the Senate attired in evening dress and white gloves and delivered a philippic that lasted over four hours. Sumner attacked every aspect of the slave system, including "the Slave-Overseer, the Slave-Breeder, and the Slave-Hunter," which together constituted a "triumvirate of Slavery in whom its essential brutality, vulgarity and crime are all embodied." Senator James Chesnut of South Carolina immediately rose to the floor to rebuke Sumner, complaining of the "malice, mendacity, and cowardice" of the address. While Chesnut might have been expected to object to the speech, not just southern Democrats criticized the effort. Senator Grimes of Iowa objected to the "harsh, vindictive, and slightly brutal" style and complained that it had "done the Republicans no good." Still, those who mattered most to Sumner—Chase and Giddings among them—lauded the effort.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Johnson, "Recollections of Charles Sumner," 483; Sumner, *Works of Charles Sumner*, 5:127-129; Henry W. Longfellow to Charles Sumner, April 20, 1860, *Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Hilen, 4:173.

⁸¹ Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1: 348-49; "A Southern Mazzini" to Charles Sumner, April 19, 1860, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 19/191; Charles Sumner to "My Dear Sir," Mar. 24, 1860, privately held, quoted in Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:349. James W. Grimes to Elizabeth Neally Grimes, June 4, 1860, quoted in Salter, *Life of James W. Grimes*, 127.

Senator Fessenden of Maine was another Republican who disagreed with the tactic of the “Barbarism of Slavery” speech. The reversal was long in coming. In 1854, Fessenden’s arrival in Washington “had the effect of a reinforcement on the field of battle,” Sumner later recalled. “Not a Senator, loving Freedom, who did not feel on that day that a champion had come.” The two men had been quite close, often walking arm-in-arm into the Senate chamber. By 1859, however, Fessenden now doubted his colleague’s mental state: “He calls himself well, but there is a change in him which strikes me unpleasantly, but which is more easily felt than described.” Matters worsened in the frantic war years, as Fessenden counseled a center course in his politics. “If I could cut the throats of about half a dozen Republican Senators...Sumner would be the first victim, as by far the greatest fool in the lot,” he complained. A final, public split took place in 1864 over a bank bill before the Senate. Fessenden felt compelled to battle Sumner until the bitter end: “I would gladly let the dirty dog alone if I could, but to bear his insolence, and suffer his malignity to have full swing would only be to destroy myself.” Sumner struck back, cajoling Vice-President Hannibal Hamlin to pursue Fessenden’s expiring appointment to the Senate.⁸²

With the political crisis in Washington building to new heights, Sumner could find little solace with his fellows Republicans. As always, Longfellow sustained his friend’s latest speech, writing, “You seem to have routed the Russians, horse, foot and dragoons.” One bit of good news came when Salmon Chase was reelected to the Senate, this time as a Republican, in 1860. “It is with true pleasure, in heart & head, that I think of yr return to this body,” Sumner wrote in

⁸² Charles Sumner, “The Late Hon. William Pitt Fessenden, Senator of Maine; Remarks in the Senate on His Death, December 14, 1869,” *Works of Charles Sumner*, 13:190. William P. Fessenden to Hamilton Fish, Dec. 17, 1859, Hamilton Fish Papers, box 45, LC; and William P. Fessenden to Elizabeth C. F. Warriner, June 1, 1862; Fessenden to William H. Fessenden, May 7, 1864, boxes 11 and 12, Fessenden Family Collection, BCL. On Fessenden, see Charles A. Jellison, *Fessenden of Maine, Civil War Senator* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1962); Landis, ““A Champion Had Come””; and the excellent update provided by Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Senator: William Pitt Fessenden and the Fight to Save the American Republic* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2011).

February. Indeed, the two men renewed their friendship from the years before the caning, dining together regularly in the capital. But other than Chase, few of the new Republicans could bear Sumner. As before, he relied upon his supporters, notably the members of the Bird Club, to guide his hand.⁸³

During the winter of the secession crisis, Sumner hoped for a peaceful settlement. To the Boston naturalist Thomas Gaffield, Sumner declared in December 1860: “The President is a traitor, who lets the vessel drift to destruction. I fear that he alone *can* save it; & he *will* not.” Well into February, Sumner still hoped for an amicable settlement and predicted to Massachusetts governor John Andrew that the “crisis is adjourned.” In this view, Sumner differed markedly with Charles Francis Adams, who believed the Union could not be preserved under any circumstances. When Adams and Sumner joined New York’s Preston King for dinner one evening, Adams scolded Sumner in no uncertain terms: “Sumner, you don’t know what you’re talking about. Yours is the very kind of stiff-necked obstinacy that will break down if you persevere.” Longfellow thought otherwise: “I need not say to you ‘Stand firm’; as you never could stand in any other way.”⁸⁴

In the end, Adams was right—the Union did dissolve. There was one immediate consolation prize for Sumner: the chairmanship of the Senate’s Committee on Foreign Affairs long held by James M. Mason now fell to Sumner. “That you should displace Mason as the head

⁸³ Henry W. Longfellow to Charles Sumner, June 7, 1860, *Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Hilen, 4:177; Charles Sumner to Salmon P. Chase, Feb. 7, 1860, “From Small Minority to Great Cause,” ed. Palmer, 182; Blue, *Salmon P. Chase*, 207; Baum, *Civil War Party System*, 56-57.

⁸⁴ Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 1:375, 380; Charles F. Adams Diary, *Adams Family Papers*, Jan. 6 and 13, 1861, reel 75; Charles Sumner to Thomas Gaffield, Dec. 29, 1860, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, reel 74/332; Charles Sumner to John A. Andrew, Feb. 6, 1861, *ibid.*, reel 74/478-81; Ford, ed., *Letters of Henry Adams*, 79-80; Henry W. Longfellow to Charles Sumner, Dec. 20, 1860, *Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Hilen, 4:202-03. For a judicious account of Sumner during the secession crisis, see Laura A. White, “Charles Sumner and the Crisis of 1860-61,” in *Essays in Honor of William E. Dodd, by His Former Students at the University of Chicago*, ed. Avery O. Craven (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1935), 131-193.

of Foreign Relations! Who would have dreamed it in 1856?” Richard Henry Dana wrote from Boston. Over time, Sumner came to view the Union’s dissolution as inevitable and began to embrace the war cause as the best way to bring about the end of slavery. Nevertheless, the war years presented Sumner with numerous personal sorrows, including the death of Fanny Appleton Longfellow in 1861 and the severe wounding of Charles Appleton Longfellow in 1863. Ever the sartorial warrior, he and Longfellow sat before photographer Alexander Gardner on December 8, 1863, for a patriotic portrait with the caption “Politics and Poetry of New England.” On a political level, he found himself more and more in a minority. During the four years of the war, Sumner broke officially with William Seward, tried to replace Lincoln on the party’s ballot, and finally, watched personally as the president slipped into eternity.⁸⁵

Always in the Breach

The Civil War did not end Charles Sumner’s career, but it did leave him disconsolate as never before. Throughout the war, he had been anticipating his own death to Longfellow. When reports came of the death of Nathaniel Hawthorne, he wrote: “One by one;- almost in *twos*, they seem to go. We shall be alone soon. I forget. I shall be alone. You have your children. Life is weary and dark - full of pain and enmity. I am ready to go at once. And still I am left.” Longfellow would hear none of it. “You have much work of the noble kind to do yet,” he wrote to Sumner in May 1864, shortly after serving as a pallbearer to Hawthorne’s funeral. And, in fact, Charles Sumner would live for another decade. Yet to one who valued so highly male

⁸⁵ Richard Henry Dana, Jr., to Charles Sumner, Mar. 9, 1861, *Papers of Charles Sumner*; Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 2:1-217.

friendship, a fate perhaps worse than death awaited him: the loss of still more of those intimates who composed his inner circle.⁸⁶

Charles Sumner had not thought about marriage for many years. He had probably last given any attention to the matter in the early 1850s. In 1866, with the war over and his mother recently deceased, suddenly new thoughts of matrimony crossed his mind. Although well into his fifties, Sumner remained on the surface an eligible bachelor (much as James Buchanan had been at a similar age). Not one for social occasions, he nevertheless met and reluctantly courted Alice Mason Hooper, the recent widow of William Sturgis Hooper and who at twenty-eight was nearly three decades Sumner's junior. On October 17, 1866, the pair married at the former home of the Cotton Whig William Appleton in Boston. Whatever love and affection the newlyweds possessed was ruined by reports that Alice Sumner had become too warmly attached to the Prussian ambassador. By September 1867, the couple had separated, and in 1873 they legally divorced. To Sumner's former dining companion, Judge Julius Rockwell, the whole affair was "very irksome...that Charles Sumner at 60 should marry this nice young widow and place her in Washington Society, to which she was not accustomed, and introduce her to 'whiskered Prussians and fierce hussars' and then be jealous." Writing to Howe about the marriage, Sumner laconically concluded: "Enough if I say that my home was hell."⁸⁷

In the fallout from his separation from Alice Mason Hooper, critics did not hesitate to ascribe the most unsavory of motivations, mixing as they did racial and sexualized language.

For example, Sumner was one of the few men in Washington to befriend the new senator from

⁸⁶ Charles Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, May 21, 1864, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, reel 78/192; Longfellow to Sumner, May 23, 1864, *Letters of Henry W. Longfellow*, ed. Hilen, 4:412.

⁸⁷ Charles H. Pope and Thomas Hooper, *Hooper Genealogy* (Boston: Charles H. Pope, 1908), 169; Julius Rockwell to Cornelia R. Bodwitch, July 10, 1868, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Library Association; Charles Sumner to Samuel G. Howe, [Nov. 17, 1867], *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 2:406. On Sumner's meeting, courtship, and marriage to Alice Mason Hooper, see Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 2:269-77, 289-95, 314-20, 571.

Mississippi, the African American Hiram Rhodes Revels. The gadfly journalist Donn Piatt mused that Sumner had “contemplated taking his colored brother to his domestic circle, to restore the lost happiness felt there so long.” The conflation of sexual impotency with cross-racial friendships symbolized a growing discontent with the program of Reconstruction underway across the South. As one of its great proponents, Sumner was highly vulnerable to vicious attacks of various kinds, and his past prominence as the recipient of a caning in 1856 was not forgotten. He was a favorite target: Thomas Nast pilloried an oversized Sumner—he had gained weight in his older age—crying at the tomb of Preston Brooks.⁸⁸

A further political hell yet awaited the newly separated Sumner. With the election of Ulysses Grant in 1868, a conservative, though corruption-ridden, influence pervaded the White House. In the domestic arena, the Radical Republicans continued in their push for military reconstruction of the South; in foreign affairs, Sumner pushed for remuneration from Great Britain for its indirect naval support of the Confederacy during the war. On this issue, Sumner and Grant came into direct conflict (Grant never liked Sumner and famously remarked that the latter embodied his conception of a bishop). When Sumner declared his support for the Democrat Horace Greeley in 1872, he was summarily removed from his chairmanship of the Foreign Affairs Committee and ostracized by his party. In coming out against Grant, moreover, Sumner alienated himself from the few remaining friends who still admired him, including Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Francis Lieber, Gerrit Smith, Hamilton Fish, and Henry Wilson. To Longfellow, he plaintively asked, “Why have I always been in the breach? And yet it seems to be the same now as at the beginning.”⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Mark W. Summers, *The Press Gang: Newspapers and Politics, 1865-1878* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1994), 55, 132; Cincinnati *Commercial Tribune*, March 14, 1870, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Charles Sumner to Henry W. Longfellow, June 22, 1870, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, 2:506-07. On Sumner’s role in Reconstruction, see David Quigley, “Charles Sumner and the Political Cultures of

As the years passed by, disputes also separated the affections of Sumner and Howe. In their old age, the two men quarreled over the question of the annexation of the island of Santo Domingo in 1871. President Grant had appointed Howe, Benjamin Wade, Andrew Dickson White, and Frederick Douglass to a special committee to investigate the possibility of annexation. Their report recommended the measure as a way to open new lands for the settlement of freedmen. In the Senate, Sumner opposed annexation on fundamentally moral, if racialized, grounds: it would be hurtful to the “African race” and its prospects for self-government in the future. Howe met with Sumner in Washington to discuss the matter, but there could be no reconciliation. Each held fast to his position.

The two men exchanged heated letters. “I hesitate to write to you of any thing where you & I, usually in such accord, are so asunder,” Sumner began a letter in August 1871. He went on to describe the great sympathies he felt for the people of Haiti, admitting that he felt a “paternalism to them keenly.” The Senate ultimately tabled the report, and no further action was taken. Yet, Howe felt stung by the defeat and showing his usual determination, he would not quit fighting for annexation. He returned to Santo Domingo the following winter, bringing along his family. The tropical climate agreed with the aged Howe, as did the investment opportunities to his entrepreneurial sons. About Sumner, he wrote to co-commissioner Andrew D. White, “I have been slowly & painfully led to the sad conclusion that Charles Sumner has become morally insane.”⁹⁰

Reconstruction in Massachusetts,” in *Boston’s Histories: Essays in Honor of Thomas H. O’Connor*, ed. James M. O’Toole and David Quigley (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 113-123; on his relationship with Grant, see also Max Shindler, “The Personal and Political Relationship between Charles Sumner and Ulysses S. Grant” (M.A. thesis, Columbia Univ., 1922).

⁹⁰ Charles Sumner to Samuel G. Howe, Aug. 3, 1871, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 064/705; Howe to Andrew D. White, Aug. 8, 1872, Andrew Dickson White Papers, box 10, RMC; Trent, *Manliest Man*, 258-70; Schwartz, *Samuel Gridley Howe*, 310-20.

The affair caused Sumner much hardship. He complained bitterly to Francis Bird that the “good men who loved truth and justice” had abandoned them, when the strength of their past friendships should have been enough to prevent such an action. Bird would later chastise Howe, who lamented what had taken place and reminisced: “Would I were worthy of the affection which he accorded to me during so many years of an intimacy as great as between brothers; & greater than between ordinary brothers.” Long gone was the intimacy of their former years; and yet, Howe could not help but reflect on the closeness of friendship once experienced between them. Julia Ward Howe, on the other hand, probably felt fewer pangs of sadness at Sumner’s passing. By 1871, Sumner noted to Edward L. Pierce that she had turned her back on him, too: “In other days she praised me when I did not deserve as well as now.” But those other days had passed; the course of politics had intervened irreparably. Thirty years later, the widowed Mrs. Howe mustered an even more laconic damnation of Sumner. When speaking of her husband’s relation to Sumner, she told her daughter: “I think that your father always undervalued himself.”⁹¹

In the end, the friendships of Sumner’s early manhood were not strong enough in the face of the physical violence enacted upon him. Two years before his death, George William Curtis called his attention to Preston Brooks’s cenotaph in the congressional cemetery, where his remains had been temporarily interred. “Poor fellow, poor fellow,” said Sumner, turning away. “How did you feel about Brooks?” Curtis asked. Sumner replied: “Only as to a brick that should fall upon my head from a chimney. He was the unconscious agent of a malign power.” For Sumner, who operated under the metaphorical equivalent of a construction zone, Brooks was not

⁹¹ Charles Sumner to Francis W. Bird, *Papers of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, reel 085/57; Samuel G. Howe to Francis Bird, Aug. 1, 1874, quoted in Schwarz, *Samuel Gridley Howe*, 331; Charles Sumner to Edward L. Pierce, May 12, 1871, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 2:558; Richards, ed., *Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe* 2:98.

the only chimney brick to tumble during his lifetime. In each stage of his life, a different brick had dropped upon his head, a different friendship destroyed in the process. At last, Charles Sumner had come to a conception of himself as that of a martyr. In this way, he reconciled the collapse of a lifetime of personal relationships with the accomplishments of a career spent in politics.⁹²

Among the last public acts of Charles Sumner's life was to approve the nomination of Caleb Cushing as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. The two men had certainly clashed in the past; Sumner admitted as much in a letter to Francis Bird. Yet, importantly, they remained friends. "Knowing C.C. as I did, would it not have been mean & craven for me to turn against him, or to skulk in silence?" he asked. No, he said, "This is not my way with friends. Such is not my idea of friendship." But, he admitted, "no earthly friendship could make me put in jeopardy our cause." In this simple statement, Sumner had finally delineated a limit to male friendship: it could not come in the way of the moral causes that had driven him for over three decades. Time and time again, he had proven his commitment to "our cause" at the expense of friendships. Now, at the end of his life, which friends remained him?⁹³

* * * * *

On the afternoon of March 11, 1874, Charles Sumner was surrounded by dozens of people. Yet, even with these tearful figures all around him, Sumner was truly alone at the end of his life. Other than Longfellow, Sumner had lost every important friendship in his life. In these tragic losses, he was not altogether different from Franklin Pierce, who lost nearly every significant friend and family member in his lifetime. But unlike the ex-president, whom Nathaniel Hawthorne called upon with his dying breath, Charles Sumner was separated from the

⁹² Haynes, *Charles Sumner*, 220.

⁹³ Charles Sumner to Francis W. Bird, Jan. 15, [18]74, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 2:627-28.

one person whom he counted closest in the world. And unlike Pierce, who died peacefully in 1869, far removed from the poisonous political world that he had only reluctantly inhabited, Sumner struggled for his cause until the end. With his last reported words—“Do not let the Civil Rights bill fail”—he helped to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1875 that afforded equal rights to freedmen being a political failure. Tragically, most of the protective provisions were later overturned in the *Ex Parte Virginia* case in 1883. As with most of his friendships, his politics ultimately proved a failure in his own time.⁹⁴

The life of Charles Sumner illustrates more than the dangers of the “lone wolf” style of politics, of which he has often been accused. Instead, his life shows how a series of crises over male friendship could direct his political future in unexpected ways. His early and apolitical associations with members of the Five of Club soon morphed into a more overtly political membership in the Bird Club. As a senator in Washington, he lived alone and found counsel in few others. Even when others of his political party entered the scene—William H. Seward, as a prime example—they could not bring Sumner into the fold. He remained dangerously out of touch with the realities of Washington politics. Instead, he relied on the epistolary correspondence with Longfellow, Howe, and others to sustain himself. By the end of his life, he would see himself the victim of conspiracy and take comfort in the thought that he had been martyred.

In fact, Charles Sumner had been a victim of conspiracy. It was a conspiracy not of one man acting alone, though his assailant would claim that he had done so. His attacker had actually participated in a cabal, a tool that built up courage and finally enabled the enactment of a violent and quite unusual assault in a place that had long been considered sacred: the floor of the

⁹⁴ Frederic A. Conningham, ed., *Currier & Ives Prints: An Illustrated Check List* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1983), 168; Mark W. Summers, *The Era of Good Stealings* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), vii-ix.

U.S. Senate. Through the very bonds of male friendship that Charles Sumner had been unable to cement in Washington, Preston Brooks and his associates stirred a plot that once enacted would change the very character of American politics. The differences between their political lives, and the friends on whom they relied, reveal a critical fault line in national politics and competing ideas about manhood in antebellum America.

CHAPTER 5: THE CANING AND THE CABAL

“Under the circumstances I felt it to be my duty to relieve Butler and avenge the insult to my State.”

--Preston Smith Brooks, May 23, 1856

On May 19 and 20, 1856, the Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner attacked the South Carolina senator Andrew Pickens Butler. Of course, Sumner's attack was one of words and included in its scope targets other than Judge Butler—Stephen Douglas and James M. Mason also received withering treatment from the Massachusetts senator. But, in the “Crime Against Kansas” speech, Sumner reserved an especially virulent venom for South Carolina and those who represented her. The successor to Daniel Webster, Sumner well knew the godlike Daniel's reply to Robert Hayne in 1833, and the younger scion of New England had already weathered his fair share of debates with the southern stalwarts of the 1850s Senate. What remained to be done, in Sumner's estimation, was to decimate the legitimacy of South Carolina and all who represented her, past and present. Less than one week after his verbal assault on the South, Charles Sumner had been caned, and Preston Smith Brooks, the delivering hand of southern vengeance, was a newly crowned hero in the eyes of his countrymen.¹

The significance of the caning has been the subject of historical inquiry ever since that fateful day in May 1856. Many questions remain difficult to answer, chief among them, the question of motive (why did Brooks do it?) and method (how did the caning come about?). Fortunately, more is now known about Preston Brooks than ever before. Historians not only of

¹ On historical interpretations of the caning, see chapter 4, footnote 2.

Brooks, but of Edgefield, South Carolina, whence he emanated, have given us rich portraits of the antebellum upcountry. Recent biographical efforts to understand Brooks and his family call for a reevaluation of Preston Smith Brooks and the world in which he lived. These efforts necessitate a return to an older interpretation of Brooks as more radical, not only in his personal affairs, but also in his participation in political culture. Even as Brooks held onto nationalist sentiments through his congressional term, he participated, unwittingly or not, in the radical edge of southern secessionist thought.²

The portrait offered in this chapter reveals Preston Brooks to be a man quite different from Charles Sumner. Whereas Sumner tended to be deferential in his scholarship and mild-mannered with his associates, Brooks was fiery and antagonistic toward authority figures and schoolmates both. While not the “Southern ruffian” of an older historiographic interpretation, neither was Preston Brooks so much the “gentleman” to avoid enacting violence upon his social equals and inferiors alike. The differences continue: Sumner graduated among the top of his class at Harvard; Brooks failed to receive a degree from his alma mater, South Carolina College. Charles Sumner’s father was a noted partisan of the Anti-Masonic Party in Massachusetts; the men of the Brooks family all counted themselves among the Masonic order.

But the two men also shared more in common than they might have imagined. Both men practiced law in the time-honored route towards respect. Restless with the legal life, Sumner became involved in the anti-war effort in 1846; Brooks, by contrast, was among the first to

² For a man whose actions have been written about in countless textbooks, historians know surprisingly little about the biography of Preston Smith Brooks. Two favorable portraits exist; see William W. Ball, *The State That Forgot: South Carolina’s Surrender to Democracy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1932), esp. 97-98; and Robert N. Mathias, “Preston Smith Brooks: The Man and His Image,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 79, no. 4 (Dec. 1978): 296-310. The forthcoming publication of Whitfield Brooks’ lengthy diaries, under the editorial direction of Dr. James Farmer, will improve this state of affairs. See also the notable senior honors thesis, Margot Bernstein, “Preston Smith Brooks in the Verbal and the Visual: Showing Face to Save Face and Avoid Disgrace in the Antebellum South” (Senior honors thesis, Williams College, 2010).

volunteer to fight on the battlegrounds of Mexico. Both men faced criticisms from their constituents, too. Much as Sumner had been taken to task for his early silence on the slavery question, Brooks was criticized for not taking enough of a pro-southern stance on the issues of the day, notably through his support of protective tariff measures. Whereas Sumner had achieved some acclaim for his rebuttals to the Kansas-Nebraska act, he had, more or less, been a disappointed to his constituents as a first-term senator. The same could be said of Brooks, who although he had firmly supported the same territorial organization bill and its pro-slavery provisions, had done precious little else to distinguish himself. With their political careers foundering, both Sumner and Brooks faced dubious reelection prospects in the fall. By May 1856, both men had something to prove to themselves, their party, and their sections.

Despite their similarities as failed politicians, Brooks's conception of manhood proved ultimately irreconcilable to Sumner's. Brooks later claimed that Sumner's attack on South Carolina and, more specifically, her elder scion, Senator Butler, induced him to the caning. The day after the caning, Brooks justified his actions as "relieving" his kinsmen and "avenging" his state. But was this justification valid? Brooks' defense of Butler, in particular, was somewhat disingenuous, as the two men could not be said to share a close relationship. Distant kinsmen—Brooks's paternal grandmother was a paternal aunt to Butler—their connection stemmed more from the Edgefield political tradition of familial solidarity and the use of violence to defend it when necessary. Like many Southerners, Preston Brooks valued and stood ready to uphold the idea of a network of kin as much as his actual kinsmen.

Personal attacks, even on the charged floor of the U.S. Senate, would not have been enough to provoke the kind of violent reaction exhibited by Preston Brooks. A greater catalyst was yet needed. Whereas Charles Sumner chose to reside alone and on the outskirts of town,

maintaining a critical distance from his enemies and colleagues alike, the same could not be said of Brooks. From the start of his first congressional term, Brooks established quarters at Brown's Hotel. There he regularly socialized with his fellow South Carolina representatives, most notably Laurence Massillon Keitt, a man to whom he would most fully tie his political fortunes. In addition to Keitt, Brooks came to know Henry Alonzo Edmundson, a representative from southwestern Virginia and fellow aspirant of southern nationalism. Together, the trio of Brooks, Keitt, and Edmundson practiced politics very differently from Sumner and most other Northerners of the day.³

What to call the trio of Brooks, Keitt, and Edmundson that enacted the caning of Charles Sumner? History often remembers the caning of Charles Sumner as the Brooks-Sumner Affair. But this is a highly inaccurate description of the caning. For antebellum Southerners, honor was understood as "a set of expectations determined and perpetuated by the community, which differentiated men in the eyes of others through public rituals." Participants in affairs of honor needed to be members of the same community. The "public rituals," which often culminated in the most extreme form of the duel, again required previous understandings of long-standing codes of conduct. Because Sumner was neither a part of the southern community, nor a willing participant in the rituals of honor culture, the caning of Sumner cannot be considered an "affair of honor." The characterization of the caning as an affair of honor, moreover, elevates what was

³ On Laurence Massillon Keitt, the best account is John H. Merchant, Jr., "Laurence M. Keitt: South Carolina Fire-eater" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Virginia, 1976). Also useful are Berry, *All That Makes a Man*, esp. 47-64, 227-29, here 56; Walther, *The Fire-Eaters*, esp. 160-94; and Elmer D. Herd, Jr., "Chapters From the Life of a Southern Chevalier: Laurence Massillon Keitt's Congressional Years, 1853-1860" (M.A. thesis, Univ. of South Carolina, 1958). On Henry Alonzo Edmundson, the most complete biography is Dana Elson McKnight, "Henry Alonzo Edmundson" (M.A. thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State Univ., 1971). About Edmundson's father, also important is Walter K. Wood, "Henry Edmundson, the Alleghany Turnpike, and 'Fotheringay' Plantation, 1805-1847: Planting and Trading in Montgomery County, Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 83, no. 3 (July 1975), 304-20. The secessionist Edmund Ruffin also often lodged at Brown's Hotel while in Washington; see "Dec. 8, 1859," in *Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, ed. Scarborough, 1:376.

in reality a brutal caning of an unarmed man into something far less violent (indeed, the very word “affair” carries far fewer connotations for violence than “assault,” or even “attack”). For these reasons, historians today prefer to describe the incident as a “caning,” or more euphemistically as an “encounter.”⁴

A better way still to describe the caning of Charles Sumner is as a cabal of three men: Preston S. Brooks, Laurence M. Keitt, and Henry A. Edmundson. In the standard rendering of American history, the word appears first in the infamous Conway Cabal, an effort by Brigadier General Thomas Conway to replace General George Washington as commander of the American forces in the early years of the Revolution. In the Conway Cabal, intrigue on the highest political level played out in a series of letters over the course of many months. In the cabal of Brooks, Keitt, and Edmundson, by contrast, the intrigue took place behind the closed doors of the boardinghouse, under the influence of alcohol, and over the compressed course of a mere two days. Like the Conway Cabal, the Brooks-Keitt-Edmundson Cabal would produce cries of conspiracy that have echoed through the years. A nascent Republican Party drew strength from the caning, and the presidential election of 1856 became far closer than it might have as a result. The political results of the Brooks-Keitt-Edmundson Cabal were much more lasting than those enacted by General Conway, in that they arguably accelerated the onset of the Civil War.⁵

⁴ On honor culture, see Bertam Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986); and Friend and Glover, “Rethinking Southern Masculinity: An Introduction,” in *Southern Manhood*, ed. Friend and Glover, vii-xvii. On affairs of honor in an earlier period, see Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*. Christopher J. Olsen recently used the phrase “Sumner-Brooks encounter” to describe the caning; see Olsen, “Political Culture in the Deep South, 1820s-1861,” in *Southern Character: Essays in Honor of Bertram Wyatt-Brown*, ed. Lisa T. Frank and Daniel Kilbridge (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2011), 41-55, here 54.

⁵ On the Conway Cabal, see Andro Linklater, *An Artist in Treason: The Extraordinary Double Life of General James Wilkinson* (New York: Walker, 2009), esp. 45-56. On the fear of a slave power conspiracy, see Richards, *The Slave Power*. The case for the importance of caning of Charles Sumner in bringing about the Civil War has been made recently by Puleo, *The Caning*; and Hoffer, *The Caning of Charles Sumner*.

To understand why their cabal successfully resulted in the caning of Charles Sumner, this chapter begins with an extended biographical treatment of its major figure, Preston Smith Brooks. Since Brooks would not have caned Sumner without the influence of Keitt and Edmundson, the chapter considers their biographies, and more importantly, their relationships with Brooks. The culture, or perhaps cult, of honor plays a role, though unlike some histories of this period, this analysis does not overly stress it as the critical factor in making sense of the caning. Instead, the gendered constructs that undergirded notions of honor provide a more useful way to conceptualize southern manhood. The political aspects of southern manhood manifested themselves in many ways, most notably in the numerous duels that dotted the landscape, but they bore special fruit in the intimate settings enabled by Washington political culture. In the closed quarters of Washington boardinghouses and hotels, without the restraining presence of women, three Southerners once again prepared to seize their political fortunes. But unlike the territorial machinations of the F Street mess two years earlier, the Brooks-Keitt-Edmundson cabal aimed at a far more personal target: Charles Sumner.

Early Lessons of the Chivalry

Preston Smith Brooks was born 1819, a scion of the South Carolina gentry. More specifically, Brooks was born into the interconnected, violent world of the upcountry Piedmont which centered on Edgefield. The elite white families, the Brookses among them, who ruled antebellum Edgefield drew their power from the kinship networks they formed with other members of the planter class. By the Civil War, the “first families” of Edgefield, among them the Butlers, Bonhams, Brookses, Simkinses, and Pickenses, “had intermarried.” The results of these intermarriages meant that state politics were unusually personal. Preston Smith Brooks, for

example, was the son of Whitfield Brooks and Mary Parsons Carroll Brooks, the paternal grandson of Colonel Zachariah Smith and Elizabeth Butler Brooks and the maternal grandson of James Parsons Carroll and Mary Giles. Through his matrilineal and patrilineal connections, Brooks shared immediate kinships ties to such men as Andrew Pickens Butler (second cousin), Pierce Mason Butler (second cousin), James Parsons Carroll (uncle), and dozens others through more distant connections.⁶

Like his many kinsmen, Preston Smith Brooks found his earlier preparation at the Moses Waddell Academy. Little is known about his experience there, but he certainly did not stop his formal education. John Chapman, the earliest historian of Edgefield, remembered first meeting Preston Brooks, James C. Brooks, Thomas Butler, Butler Thompson, and Thomas Bird, among others, at the school taught by Charles K. Johnson in Mount Enon, though he also recalled Brooks having attended preparatory school at Willington. By age sixteen, he had prepared sufficiently to enter South Carolina College in Columbia.⁷

When Brooks enrolled at South Carolina College, the school had already faced its fair share of students misbehaving. Another Edgefield native, Louis T. Wigfall, had attended the college and graduated in 1837, but not without first engaging in vexing visitations to local taverns. Wigfall was appropriately chastised by the faculty, but the irascible young man could

⁶ Two recent histories of Edgefield, South Carolina, have posited an “Edgefield Tradition,” though with differing interpretations. Orville Vernon Burton takes a multi-perspectival approach to the town’s history, offering views from whites, enslaved blacks, and free blacks during the antebellum and post-bellum periods. With the advantages of citizenship, wealth, and racial power, the white elites emerged as a tightly knit group of kin; see Burton, *In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions*, 66, 90. See also the earlier but still useful work, John A. Chapman, *History of Edgefield County from the Earliest Settlements to 1897* (Newberry, S.C., 1897) and the much-needed update by the Edgefield County Historical Society, *The Story of Edgefield* (Edgefield, S.C., 2009). For a contrasting view, see Lacy K. Ford, “Origins of the Edgefield Tradition: The Late Antebellum Experience and the Roots of Political Insurgency,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 98, no. 4 (Oct. 1997): 328-48; and Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism*. See also James H. Welborn, III, “Fighting For Revival: Southern Honor and Evangelical Revival in Edgefield County, South Carolina, 1800-1860,” (M.A. thesis, Clemson Univ., 2007).

⁷ Chapman, *History of Edgefield County*, 26, 266.

not stay out of trouble. The college's president, Robert W. Barnwell, who at age thirty-two was not much older than the students he supervised and who likewise shared a checkered past of student misbehavior, endeavored to portray the students favorably in a November 1836 report: "I may with confidence assert that the conduct of the students has been most exemplary." Even as most students conducted themselves in an "exemplary" fashion, others were less attentive to proper comportment. A year later, Professor Francis W. Lieber offered a mild rebuke in his report to the Board of Trustees, noting: "Some members of this class studied with great zeal; many did not show proper exertion." Two days later, the college expelled two students for having attempted to fight a duel.⁸

As a student, Brooks belied President Barnwell's positive assessment of the larger student body. By the end of his first year at the college, Brooks had already twice faced punishments for infractions. Brooks first faced faculty judgment in fall 1836 for leaving campus for nearby Lexington without permission. For this minor breach of conduct, he was pardoned without a second thought, due to his high class rank. The next year, in June 1837, spotty attendance at recitations caused the faculty to suspend him until September. The young Brooks' penchant for misbehavior continued, when he was punished again for patronizing off-campus

⁸ On Louis T. Wigfall, the best biography remains Alvy L. King, *Louis T. Wigfall, Southern Fire-eater* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1970). Also useful is Walther, *Fire-Eaters*, esp. 160-194. For a helpful early history of South Carolina College, see Daniel W. Hollis, *University of South Carolina, Volume I: South Carolina College* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1951), 138-139. Also useful are the faculty meeting minutes for Nov. 29, 1836, June 13, 1837, Nov. 27, 1837, Jan. 4, 1838, and Nov. 27, 1839, in the *Minutes of the Faculty of South Carolina College*, SCL; and board of trustee meeting minutes for Nov. 29, 1836, June 13, 1847, Nov., 1837, Jan. 4, 1838, and Nov. 27, 1839, in *Records of the University of South Carolina Board of Trustees* (microfilm, 9 reels, Columbia: South Caroliniana Library, 1965), reel 1. After his time as college president, Robert W. Barnwell served in the Senate seat left vacant by the death of John C. Calhoun in March 1850.

locales, including Briggs' tavern. After one year, Brooks was already beginning to show, in the words of the college's chronicler, "a genius for staying in difficulty."⁹

Conflicts with the rules of the college continued, though the next infraction was directly related to a dispute with a fellow student. For many college students of the middle 1800s, the decision to join a literary society was natural, almost required. Brooks had chosen the Clariosophic Society. By January 1838, he was angling for a leadership position within the organization. When his fellow Society member, Lewis R. Simons, who had previously promised not to electioneer against Brooks, broke his pledge, Brooks declared him to be a "falsifier." Simons took offense to the charge and coolly challenged Brooks to a duel. Brooks refused the challenge, fully aware of the college rules prohibiting such conduct. Never one to back down from a fight, Brooks offered a "boy's satisfaction," meaning a physical altercation, sans deadly weapons. Nevertheless, both young men took to arming themselves as a precautionary measure, Simons still desirous of a proper duel. The inevitable clash took place, when Simons, in an interesting foreshadowing of later events, produced a horsewhip and attempted to use it on Brooks (in the code of honor of the day, the decision to employ the horsewhip implied disdain for the subject of the beating). Brooks, prepared with his pistol, drew but did not fire. Simons objected to the introduction of the pistol, proclaiming his unarmed status. Soon enough, fists became the primary weapons of the two men. In the ensuing faculty judgment on the matter, Simons received expulsion and Brooks a forced suspension until the following April.¹⁰

Matters continued to get worse for Preston Brooks. Upon his return to the college, he continued visitations to Briggs' Tavern and absented himself from required classes. Despite these taboo forays, Brooks passed all the necessary exams and by November 1839 thought

⁹ Hollis, *South Carolina College*, 138.

¹⁰ *ibid*, 138-139.

himself suitable for graduation. As if on cue, events transpired that brought out a Hotspur spirit in Brooks. Acting on a report that his brother, Ham, had been imprisoned at the Columbia guard house, Brooks set out immediately for the jail, his dueling pistols from his previous encounter with Simons in hand. No violence resulted from his “riotous behavior,” but the young man was suspended pending a decision of the college’s Board of Trustees. Brooks’ classmates submitted a petition on his behalf; the former governor George McDuffie got involved and recommended to allow him to graduate, citing his reaction, as “the natural excitement of the circumstances [which] the fervor of youth should render venial.” Nothing could save him now, however. Upon recommendation of the faculty, the Board of Trustees voted to expel him from South Carolina College. One of the members of the Board was Judge Andrew Pickens Butler, Brooks’s kinsman. Since individual votes are not recorded in the minutes, no record exists of Judge Butler’s vote, but given his long memory on other matters, Brooks may very well have resented the elderly judge’s involvement in the matter.¹¹

The world of upcountry planters into which Preston Smith Brooks was born promoted a particular form of Southern manhood that prioritized honor and mastery. A strict adherence to a code of honor, of which the code duello formed an important part, informed manly comportment especially for Edgefield planters. As such, Edgefield carried a reputation for dueling unmatched elsewhere in the state or nation. The “Hotspur reputation” of Edgefield may not be entirely fair, as geographic and economic considerations also explain the radical, agrarian style politics of the region in a later period. Nevertheless, Preston Brooks undeniably was a product the tight knit community of planters in which elite white manhood depended in large part on mastery over subordinates, free and enslaved, and notions of honor governed conduct in affairs public and in private.

¹¹ *ibid*, 139; *Trustee Minutes*, Nov. 27, 1839.

Honor as Good as Preston Brooks's

In 1840, Preston Brooks returned to Edgefield, bereft of the degree he had spent years working toward. The year 1840 also proved to be an election year, replete with ironies both in the nation and in South Carolina. On the national level, the Whigs nominated the affluent William Henry Harrison and ran a farcical campaign touting his log cabin roots. Harrison easily trampled the incumbent Martin Van Buren, who had actually been born poor, in the November election. The Democratic Party in South Carolina, which had split over the question of nullification in 1833, remained divided in the selection of a governor (the Whigs exerted no influence in the state). To a degree unusual elsewhere in the country, the foot soldiers in South Carolina's political battles were the editorial staff of leading newspapers, which meant that newspaper editors were among the most regular of duelists across the South. The Charleston *Mercury*, known as a Nullification organ, turned about face and nominated the Unionist John Richardson as its candidate. James Henry Hammond, an ambitious Nullifier, ran against him. Richardson edged out Hammond among the voting legislators, but Hammond would yet have his day: he was chosen governor in 1842.¹²

In 1840, Preston Smith Brooks was twenty-one years old, reeling from his expulsion from South Carolina College, and reluctantly returned to his family in Edgefield. Once home, he was likely puzzled to learn that ardent young Nullifier Louis T. Wigfall publicly supported the Unionist candidate John Richardson. The decision was extraordinary on multiple levels. Also a native of Edgefield, Wigfall was, like Brooks, trained at South Carolina College and emerged as

¹² On the gubernatorial practices of antebellum South Carolina, see David D. Wallace, *The History of South Carolina*, 4 vols. (New York: American Historical Society, Inc., 1935), esp. 2:477-78, for the Richardson-Hammond contest, and 2:478 and 3:76, for the role of newspapers men in electioneering. On dueling among newspapermen, see especially Jack K. Williams, *Dueling in the Old South: Vignettes of Social History* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1980); and Bruce Dickson, *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South*, (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1979): 21-43.

an extreme proponent of secession, thanks in large part to the teaching of college president Thomas Cooper. After graduating in 1837, Wigfall nominally practiced law in Edgefield, though his true passions quickly led him to politics.

Wigfall's decision in 1840 to support Richardson over the Edgefield District scion Hammond most likely stemmed from his close friendship with John Lawrence Manning, who was Richardson's nephew (and later became governor himself). Wigfall had known Manning since their days together at the college, and they had shared the intimacies of private thoughts and feelings. In his letters to Manning, Wigfall regularly confessed his feelings on nearly every topic: "We have been together in sickness & in health--when we were merry when we were sad. My bosom has been bared to you I have told you what no else has ever heard. I have ever confided in you & you ought by this time to have learned that in my hearts love, a *dearer place*, has no man than yourself." Wigfall bared his bosom repeatedly in the letters, meditating on the inevitability of becoming a "predestinated old bachelor," his desire on multiple occasions to quit drinking, and his wish that "[a]mbition shall be my mistress." The newly ambitious Wigfall may very well have become active in the gubernatorial contest, in the words of his biographer, "craving for excitement and a tangible goal."¹³

Once thus engaged, Wigfall poured his energies into the political campaign through the mechanism of the *Edgefield Advertiser*. Wigfall cleverly convinced the editor of the *Advertiser*, W. F. Durisoe, that Richardson enjoyed the support of South Carolina political heavyweight John C. Calhoun (though perhaps true, this was not actually stated to be the case). Hammond fought back, pressuring the newspaper to retract its support of Richardson, but Wigfall was playing

¹³ Such would not be the case, as Wigfall remained a noted drinker and philanderer. Louis T. Wigfall to John L. Manning, Jan., 18 [ca. 1840], Williams, Chesnut, and Manning Families Papers, SCL; and Alvy L. King, "The Emergence of a Fire-Eater: Louis T. Wigfall," *Louisiana Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1968), 73-82, here 76.

hardball: he convinced Durisoe that the newspaper could attract many more subscribers through its support of Richardson. In the end, Wigfall got his way and the *Advertiser* endorsed Richardson.¹⁴

Preston Brooks and his family were among the greatest supporters of Hammond, and they now stood in open opposition to Wigfall. This new antagonism was only the latest cause for resentment. For years, Wigfall had felt that the Brookses had snubbed his brother Arthur, an Episcopalian minister, from obtaining a church in Edgefield. He also may have been pursuing the same woman as Preston Brooks. In one letter to John L. Manning, Wigfall railed against the Hammond supporters, particularly Brooks's uncle James Parsons Carrol and his father Whitfield, and hinted at the possible romantic element to the conflict: "If I go to Augusta,...make love to la belle Anna--shoot two of Hammond's friends in the morning--return to Edgefield & gain all my cases[,] do you think she could say--No?" In addition, Wigfall's chief opponent for control of the *Edgefield Advertiser* was editor Pierre F. LaBorde, who was himself a brother to the attending physician to the Brooks' family, Dr. Maximilian LaBorde, and a brother to Whitfield Brooks by marriage. Additionally, Whitfield Brooks believed that Wigfall and Armistead Burt had conspired to thwart Francis W. Pickens and Sampson H. Butler, both relatives to Brooks by marriage, from obtaining Congressional seats, and he denounced Wigfall for the snub. Not surprising, then, that Wigfall felt "a perfect appetite" for vengeance against the Brooks family.¹⁵

¹⁴ The best account of the events leading to the Brooks-Wigfall duel remains Clyde W. Lord, "Young Louis Wigfall: South Carolina Politician and Duelist," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 59, no. 2 (April 1958): 96-112. While essential as a biography, King confuses some details surrounding the election of 1840 and the Brooks-Wigfall duel; see King, *Louis T. Wigfall*, 20-47. See also Walther, *The Fire-Eaters*, esp. 175-177; and Clyde W. Lord, "The Ante-bellum Career of Louis Trezevant Wigfall" (M.A. thesis, Univ. of Texas, 1925).

¹⁵ Louis T. Wigfall to John L. Manning, March 19, [1840], Williams, Chesnut, and Manning Families Papers, SCL. Lord, "Young Louis Wigfall," 101. Pierre LaBorde's brother, Dr. Maxmilian LaBorde, was also involved with the founding of the newspaper, but he was not editor of the *Advertiser* in 1840; see Maxmilian LaBorde, *History of the South Carolina College* (Charleston, S.C.: Walker & Evans,

The war of words soon escalated into one of fists as well, with the opening salvo in the form of a public letter from Whitfield Brooks in June 1840. In the letter, the elder Brooks attacked “false and ungenerous insinuations” that Hammond supported an unpopular political faction. Wigfall, in his capacity as de facto editor of the *Advertiser*, replied under the pseudonym “Sub-Treasury” to the opposite effect. Preston Brooks wrote the next reply, under the name “Philo Edgefield,” declaring the editor’s remarks beneath condescension. Then Preston Brooks took the matter one step further, revealing the capacity for instigation that would be a hallmark of his adult life. On June 27, he informed Joseph Glover that Louis Wigfall had called him, Glover, a coward. Wigfall, who had previously been involved in another affair of honor with Glover (he served as a second to Glover’s antagonist, though but the two men were apparently on good terms by 1840), was present to hear Brooks’s remarks, and he immediately rebuffed the claim. The two men exchanged heated words, but these proved insufficient; Brooks then accosted Wigfall and a fist fight ensued. The fight resulted in a challenge to a duel from Wigfall to Brooks, who was first given time to practice with dueling pistols, since the former was known to be an excellent marksman.¹⁶

By 1840, Brooks and Wigfall could comport their behavior with strict adherence to the code of honor. Two years earlier, the former South Carolina Governor John Lyde Wilson had published *The Code of Honor; or Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Dueling*, which reinforced long-standing rules for principals and seconds and made special provisions for secrecy and for the act of posting. Of course, Brooks and Wigfall did not require Wilson’s treatise on the topic, for they could rely on countless of other summations of the code

1874), x; Maxmilian LaBorde to James Henry Hammond, July 8, 1840, James H. Hammond Papers, LC; and Martha Caroline Brooks mention of Dr. LaBorde several times as the family’s physician in “Extracts from the diary of my husband for the children,” Preston Smith Brooks Papers, SCL,

¹⁶ Clyde W. Lord, “Young Louis Wigfall,” 104-105.

duello and their many kinsmen for guidance. Still, all parties could agree to basic components of the duel: issuance of the challenge, the reliance on seconds, the choice of weapons and location, and the procedures for the actual encounter.¹⁷

If one affair of honor were not enough, Wigfall soon received another challenge, this time from Preston Brooks's uncle, James Parsons Carroll. In July 1840, Carroll, a respected judge in Edgefield District, claimed that Wigfall had breached his trust by speaking freely of political matters shared in confidence. Louis Wigfall was now facing challenges from two members of the Brooks family. At this point, several members of the Edgefield community intervened. Two brothers of the Butler family with standing in the town, Pierce Mason Butler and Andrew Pickens Butler, began correspondence with the two men's seconds. A board of honor, composed of Wade Hampton, Franklin H. Elmore, William Harper, J.H. Means, and Maximillian LaBorde concluded that Preston Brooks' comment about Glover was made without any intended offense. That ended the troubles, for now.¹⁸

In the fall of 1840, Preston Brooks, unsatisfied with the resolution of the affair, began to denounce Wigfall in newspapers, claiming that his opponent had retracted earlier statements. Wigfall used his editorial office to publish a retort on October 22, which included a further comment contradictory to Whitfield Brooks. Whitfield Brooks replied with his own rebuttal. Now Wigfall challenged Whitfield Brooks to a duel. In reply to the challenge, one account stated, the elder Brooks "thrust the head of the bearer [of the challenge], a young lawyer, through a window pane," and took no further notice. Another account reported that Whitfield Brooks

¹⁷ On the code duello, see John Lyde Wilson, *The Code of Honor; or Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Dueling* (Charleston, S.C.: James Phinney, 1858). For an excellent account of the evolution of dueling in the antebellum Southeast, see Trina Evarts, "Code Duello in the American Southeast: An Evolving Drama" (M.A. thesis, Univ. of South Carolina, 2000).

¹⁸ Andrew P. Butler to James H. Hammond, July 24, 1840, and Pierce Mason Butler to James H. Hammond, July 2, 6, 8, and 18, 1840, James H. Hammond Papers, LC.

caned the bearer of the news, a suggestion that the cane was a favored punishment in the Brooks household.¹⁹

The next step was predictable. Under the code duello, Wigfall announced his intention to post Whitfield Brooks for denying the challenge. He set the date and time at four o'clock on Friday, October 30, 1840. Who would confront Wigfall on Whitfield Brooks' behalf? Preston Brooks was away from town, which left James Parsons Carroll to fill the familial void. Carroll brought along Thomas Bird, a nephew to Whitfield and a cousin to Preston, to confront Wigfall at Edgefield Courthouse. Violence again erupted, this time deadly. Wigfall anxiously protected the paper posting from harm, but Carroll moved to tear down the placard anyway. Confusion ensued. Thomas Bird shot at Wigfall, thinking perhaps he was going to shoot Carroll, but Bird missed. Wigfall returned fire at Bird, and he also missed. Both men shot again, and this time Bird was mortally wounded in the exchange. Seeing his kinsman shot, Carroll called Wigfall a "cold-blooded murderous scoundrel." This elicited an immediate challenge from Wigfall to a duel. The date was set for five days from the initial challenge.²⁰

In the meanwhile, Preston Brooks had returned to Edgefield and heard of the death of his cousin. Bird had been a member of the same class at South Carolina College, and his kinsman's death enraged Brooks. The younger Brooks patiently awaited the outcome of the Wigfall-Carroll affair, when he joined his father on November 4 to witness the duel on an island in the middle of the Savannah River. Both men shot hastily and, likely on purpose, they missed far off the mark (Whitfield Brooks caustically observed, "They exchanged shots without effect"). Their seconds

¹⁹ For the window anecdote about Whitfield Brooks' response to Louis Wigfall, see Ulysses R. Brooks, ed., *South Carolina Bench and Bar*, 2 vols. (Columbia, S.C.: State Company, 1908), 1:106-107, and Lord, "Young Louis Wigfall," 108.

²⁰ Lord, "Young Louis Wigfall," 108-109; Louis T. Wigfall to John L. Manning, April 25, 1841, Williams, Chesnut, and Manning Families Papers, SCL.

immediately intervened and prevented further fire. Carroll agreed that he had spoken in haste, and the hostilities ended between the two men.²¹

Preston Brooks promptly challenged Wigfall to a duel, to which the latter eagerly agreed. No board of honor could stop the two men now, nor would their seconds arrange to fire shots wide of the mark. Brooks family blood had been spilled; revenge was now paramount. Time was allowed for Pierce Mason Butler to travel from Columbia to serve as Brooks' second, while Wigfall chose his close college friend John L. Manning as his second. The duel was set for a "bleak island in the River, called Goat Island, containing about one acre of land & having no accommodations but its insulated situation which protected the party from interruption." The date was fixed for Wednesday, November 11, 1840.²²

Both men were out for blood, and both men got it. After missing on their first shots, each succeeded on the second round. Brooks was shot through the left hip and left arm, while Wigfall was impacted through both thighs. There the shots ended. "Owing to the situation of the island, & the want of accommodations in the neighborhood," Whitfield Brooks recorded in his diary, "they were forced to remain on the island during the night, on the very spots, where they fell." In what must rank as one of the more awkward shared boat rides in American history, the two men were taken together in the same rowboat down the Savannah River, first to Augusta then Hamburg. Their recovery times varied. Whitfield Brooks gloomily recorded no improvement in Preston's condition through the end of 1840. By January 1841, the younger Brooks began to

²¹ Whitfield Brooks Diary, 1840-1841, transcript by Jim Farmer, original in private possession.

²² Whitfield Brooks Diary, 1840-1841, Wed., Nov. 11, 1840.

show signs of improved health. By spring, he was recovered enough to walk, but the wound lingered for years to come. Brooks would walk with a cane for the rest of his life.²³

The affair was not over yet. Wigfall, fully recovered from his leg injuries, demanded further satisfaction of his honor under the code duello. Because Preston Brooks had claimed in late October that Wigfall had retracted “everything” towards him, Wigfall found a technical opening to issue yet another challenge to Brooks. A second board of honor intervened and arbitrated the matter. By December 1840, Pierce Mason Butler, acting on Brooks’ behalf, thought the outcome would be “acceptable to all parties,” but the hostilities continued further. “I am told it is necessary we should act to close the affair,” Butler wrote to Wigfall’s representative James W. Cantey in February 1841. By March, Butler had prepared a “permanent adjustment between those young men.” Still, the problems lingered. “Cant you come over here & let us terminate it,” he wrote to Cantey a month later. The negotiations continued to July 1841, when Wigfall, communicating through newspapers, let it be known that an “offensive article” published by Brooks the previous fall was the last unresolved matter. After another round of correspondence, the affair came to a close.²⁴

Wigfall persisted in his hatred of the Brooks family for the remainder of his days. “I can stand any thing but being told that *my honor* is as good as *Preston Brooks*,” he fumed in an April 1841 letter to Manning. As if an afterthought, Wigfall’s candidate, John Richardson, had won the governorship in the fall, and the bullet in Wigfall’s thigh earned him the position of aide-de-camp to the governor, with a military commission and the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Wigfall’s political success in South Carolina proved short-lived. The duel had hurt his

²³ Whitfield Brooks Diary, 1840-1841, Wed., Nov. 11, 1840. See also the later account in “A Notable Southern Duel,” *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 1897, reprinted from the *Augusta Herald*; the article incorrectly cites the duel as taking place in 1841.

²⁴ Pierce M. Butler to J. W. Cantey, Dec. 18, 1840, Feb. 27, 1841, Mar. 30, 1841, and April 2, 1841, Cantey Family Papers, box 1, folders 5, SCL.

reputation in Edgefield, to say nothing of his professional aspirations as an editor and lawyer, and he would not remain much longer in South Carolina. The influence of the Brooks and their allies permanently marked him as an enemy in the interconnected world of Edgefield. By 1846, even Manning had turned his back on Wigfall. The volatile Edgefield native decided to pursue his fortunes in Texas, where he remained through the next decade. Wigfall eventually returned east, first to Washington as a senator and later to Charleston where he negotiated the surrender of the Union garrison at Fort Sumter.²⁵

What can we make of this labyrinthine tale of dueling in South Carolina? On one level, the Brooks-Wigfall affair was more sensational than it was unusual. “Such was the nature of Carolina politics,” as the historian John Edmunds surmises, that “factionalism, violence and treachery abounded.” The duel with Louis Wigfall did not materially harm Preston Brooks’ career. In fact, his prospects for political success only increased. When James Henry Hammond successfully obtained the governorship in 1842, Brooks was appointed aide-de-camp, the very same position that Louis Wigfall had held under the previous governor. Brooks was by no means universally praised in this role. Governor Hammond thought Brooks a “mal-apropos young man of little talent, but fidgety to be doing, and always moving in the wrong time and place, just like his father before him, another particular friend, both of whose doings in my behalf have cost me no little in many ways.” The resentment also ran deep between Hammond and the Brooks.²⁶

²⁵ Louis T. Wigfall to John L. Manning, April 25, 1841, Williams, Chesnut, and Manning Families Papers, SCL; King, *Louis Wigfall*, 33-34; Walther, *Fire-Eaters*, 177. On Wigfall’s later role in the surrender of Fort Sumter, see diary entry for April 15, 1861, in *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, ed. Woodward, 49.

²⁶ John B. Edmunds, Jr., *Francis W. Pickens and the Politics of Destruction* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1986), 52. Historians of dueling draw on countless examples of two men coming to blows, often over the slightest of provocations. Jack Williams thought the duel important for what it adds to the “credibility to theories about the Southerner’s rigid class structure, exaggerated sense of honor,

The duel with Louis Wigfall might have provided Preston Brooks with the necessary badge of honor for entry into politics. In 1844, Brooks was handily elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives, where he quickly began to imagine ways to create political coalitions. He naturally turned to his fellow South Carolina College classmates. In a letter to Ezekiel Pickens Noble, Brooks congratulated the Abbeville District native on his election and opined on their future prospects together: “There will be four of our ‘set’—John Manning[,] Dick Barrus, you & myself in the House. Manning I believe was your senior Barry your classmate and I your [Sophs].” As Brooks well knew, the four men of the “set” were once students together at South Carolina College, which may have caused Brooks to overlook Manning’s prior friendship with Wigfall. For Brooks, the details of past affairs of honor do not seem to have prevented him from forming a “set” with other politicians.²⁷

The reputation garnered from the duel gave Preston Brooks an entry to pursuing two others positions: husband and father. He married Caroline Harper Means of Columbia at Buckhead, Fairfield District, on March 11, 1841, not long after his convalescence from the duel with Wigfall. Caroline died young, most likely due to complications related to the birth, and subsequent death, of a baby, named Whitfield Brooks, on June 28, 1843. Preston remarried on January 2, 1845, to Caroline’s first cousin, Martha Caroline Means, with whom he would have four children. According to Martha Caroline Means Brooks’ diary, written many years later, Preston “was in college in Columbia when I was a girl at school and we were great friends.” Martha mentioned nothing further of the circumstances of their courtship. Their first home

lingering classic romanticism, and reluctance to be confined by the letter of the law.” An earlier historian, John Hope Franklin, found great significance for the meaning of Southern slavery in the duel, even as he felt most Southerners thought dueling, like slavery, a “necessary evil.” Williams, *Dueling in the Old South*, 6; John H. Franklin, *The Militant South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 62. James Henry Hammond Diary, Dec. 26, [1844], quoted in *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern Slaveholder*, ed. Carol Bleser (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 140.

²⁷ Preston S. Brooks to Ezekiel Pickens Noble, Oct. 28, 1844, Noble Family Papers, folder 22, SCL.

together was at Sweetbrier, where the Brookses had been residing since 1841, about three miles from Edgefield Court House, and there the new couple's first child, Marie, was born on January 31, 1846. This child, the first of two girls named Marie, did not live long. After the Mexican-American War, Brooks purchased his father's house in Edgefield village, where he stayed some five years. A second Marie was born there on August 4, 1849. A third child, Caroline, was born in 1851, followed by Rosa in 1852 and Preston, Jr., in 1853. By this time they had moved into a new home, which the Brookses took to calling Leaside.²⁸

By the early 1840s, Preston Brooks had proven his commitment to the tenets of honor and family and had begun a career in politics. He was also a proud member of important community organizations, among them the Trinity Episcopal Church and the Concordia Lodge of the Free and Accepted Masons (no. 50). Both organizations included other members of the network of Brooks kin. Preston's father Whitfield Brooks was, along with his wife Mary Parsons Carroll Brooks, a founding member of the church in 1835. The following year, Whitfield joined Andrew Pickens Butler, James Parsons Carroll, Francis W. Pickens, Francis Hugh Wardlaw and Edmund B. Bacon to build the first church building. Members of the Brooks family would be buried at the church's cemetery in the years to come.²⁹

Unlike the Trinity Church, the second organization, Concordia Lodge (no. 50), consisted entirely of men and promoted homosocial affiliations with other citizens. The best evidence of Brooks' identification with the Masons may be found in a surviving daguerreotype in which he

²⁸ Martha Caroline Means Brooks Diary, Preston Smith Brooks Papers, SCL; *Edgefield Advertiser* (Centennial Edition, 1936) as transcribed in the "Brooks Family Bulletin" 2, no. 3 (July 1973), 50, available at <<http://www.Brookshistorian.org>>; see also the incomplete transcription in the sesquicentennial edition of the *Edgefield Advertiser*, Mar. 5, 1986, section 6, page 5, col. 1-2. Unfortunately, a page is missing from the diary that appears to have been about the Brookses time in Washington. On the Means family, see A.S. Salley, Jr., ed., "Thomas Means and Some of His Descendants," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 7, no. 4 (Oct. 1906): 204-16.

²⁹ Edgefield County Historical Society, *The Story of Edgefield*; see also Historic Edgefield, "Historic Sites," available <<http://www.historicedgefield.com/id7.html>>.

proudly wears the compass of the Masonic order on his dress shirt. Likewise, in the arrangements for his funeral in 1857, the “Masonic Fraternity” presented alongside other organizations in which Brooks counted membership, including the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows. While Charles Sumner likely did not know of Brooks’ Masonic involvement or Preston Brooks of Sumner’s anti-Masonic political affiliations, the early character of these two men was forged either strongly for or against freemasonry. In their later years, Brooks probably continued his affiliation with freemasonry in Washington, as there was ample opportunity to do so at the various lodges in the city. Brooks’s connections to the Free Masons and the Odd Fellows underscores the importance of male social institutions in the foundation of his public identity.³⁰

Honor as Delicate as a Woman’s

The events of the 1840s presented Preston Brooks with the opportunity to venture beyond the confines of Edgefield. In 1846, he was among the first to volunteer to serve in the war with Mexico. Brooks, now with the rank of captain, organized a company of men from the Edgefield District, to serve under the direction of his second cousin, Colonel Pierce Mason Butler. The enthusiasm exhibited in the organization of the company elicited a warm reply from Colonel Butler: “I am *much* gratified at the spirit of patriotism evinced by your self & other officers.

From Old Edgefield nothing less was expected.” The “spirit of patriotism” reflected the martial

³⁰ On Sept. 25, 1840, a warrant for a lodge was issued in Edgefield, South Carolina, under the name of Concordia to Alex M. McCaine (a landed farmer), John Kirksey (who ran a tavern and later became a planter), and Robert McCullough (another planter holding many thousand acres of land). The new lodge must have failed, because on June 4, 1844, a new warrant was granted to revive the chapter. Previous lodges in Edgefield included the Edgefield Lodge (no. 46) and Social Lodge (no. 58). There also existed a Butler Lodge (no. 59) in the Edgefield District, which was named for Moses Butler, most likely a distant relative to the family of Andrew Pickens Butler. See Albert C. Mackey, *History of Freemasonry in South Carolina, From Its Origins in the Year 1736 to the Present Times* (Columbia: South Carolinian Steam Power Press, 1861), 216, 276, 530-31, 534; *Edgefield Advertiser*, April 1 and Aug. 5, 1846; and “Arrangements for the Reception of the Remains of Hon. Preston S. Brooks,” Nicholson, Hughes, and Bones Families Papers, SCL.

enthusiasm of the 1840s and 1850s, an era of filibustering expeditions to Central and South America and dreams of a vast continental empire. In an age of “Manifest Destiny,” the war with Mexico was the last time in which southerners provided unreserved support to a national war-making effort. When combined with the fervent desire to prove his manhood and the lure for battlefield glory, the opportunities offered by an officer commission in the army was a potent cocktail for Preston Brooks.³¹

The prospects for glory and honor on the battlefield quickly soured for Captain Brooks, however. In April 1847 while at Vera Cruz, Brooks faced “very feeble health for some time & has lately suffered a severe attack of fever,” according to the official report of regimental surgeon Dr. James Davis. Brooks was battling Typhoid Fever, a disease “extremely fatal in our...country,” as the regimental surgeon later reported. Nevertheless, Brooks persevered and insisted upon traveling to nearby Jalapa, under the notion that “the complete change of air and water would restore him to health.” The Typhoid persisted, and Brooks was informed that to remain in Mexico meant death. Brooks had no choice but an evacuation to the more salubrious climate of South Carolina. The next day, Adjutant General William H. French issued Special Order 79, granting Captain Brooks sixty days leave of absence. Brooks accordingly returned to Edgefield for convalescence. Less than a month later, he reported for recruiting duty, one to which the recovering captain knew would be difficult due to “reports of discharged soldiers as to the disasters of the [Mexican] climate.” Brooks respectfully requested, if he were meant to recruit new soldiers, to do so in “the upper Districts of this State from which no volunteers have [been] taken & whe[re] no reports of the climate have reached.” No less the patriot, Brooks

³¹ Pierce M. Butler to Preston S. Brooks, Dec. 6, 1846, Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folder 1, SCL. For an interpretation of Brooks’s wartime record, see Kenneth A. Deitreich, “‘The Sly Mendacity of Hints’: Preston Brooks and the War with Mexico,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 113, no 4 (Oct. 2012): 290-314.

exhibited a practical attitude toward his new assignment. As a victim of fever himself, he knew the best chance to find new material for the army was among men whose willingness to fight had not yet been tainted by reports of the hardships in the field.³²

In addition to these recruiting duties, Brooks also exerted considerable effort to dispel lingering accusations of dereliction of duty made by his neighbors in Edgefield. Brooks sensed that he needed the regimental surgeon to clear his name of any malfeasance, and in August 1847, he wrote Dr. Davis, lamenting that his feelings has been “wounded by information just received that I am reproached even by worthy persons of my District in consequence of my absence on these occupations.” Brooks then interrogated Dr. Davis with a series of leading questions, demanding “a full reply to each interrogation with a view to laying your professional & personal testimony before [the people] of my native District the confidence & respect of which I value more than life itself.” The desire for the “confidence & respect” of the people of Edgefield had become a matter of life and death for Preston Brooks. As his experience in college and in his duels with Louis Wigfall and others had taught him, Brooks knew that reputation mattered more than nearly anything else in determining the measure of a man.³³

Finally, on October 7, Dr. Davis issued a detailed accounting of Brooks’ incapacitating fever and subsequent stubborn refusal to be removed from the front. The report dutifully reported Brooks’s bravery, but it also revealed a painful medical reality. During a hard march, Dr. Davis noticed “a singular movement in his gait” from where Brooks had been “wounded, a few years ago.” The irregularity of gait in Brooks’ left leg resulted from the bullet still lodged in his leg from the duel with Louis Wigfall six years earlier. “I now believe,” Davis concluded,

³² Statement by James Davis, May 2, 1847, James Davis to Preston S. Brooks, Oct. 7, 1847 (copy), Special Order No. 79, May 3, 1847, Regimental Order, June 3, 1847, and Preston S. Brooks to Adjutant General Roger Jones, July 2, 1847, Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folder 1, SCL.

³³ Preston S. Brooks to James Davis, Aug. 26, 1847, Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folder 1, SCL.

“that march was in a great measure the cause of his subsequent illness.” Davis’ report was as much as Brooks could hope for, though it proved insufficient to provide the recognition he so desperately craved. Ironically, Brooks was prevented from obtaining further honor through military service by an affair of honor prior to the war.³⁴

The forced leave at home did not sit well with the restless soldier. A mere two months after his return to South Carolina, Brooks was itching for the chance to return to Mexico, fully aware that glory was slipping by him. If he might yet be part of a decisive battle, he would need help on a different, non-military front. To that end, Brooks wrote to his kinsman Senator Andrew Pickens Butler, beseeching his aid in expediting his return to the battlefield. Senator Butler complied and wrote to Adjutant General Roger Jones on September 16, 1847. Jones’ reply indicates that the senator had made a compelling case: “For the reasons therein, Captain *Preston S. Brooks*...has been ordered to rejoin his company without delay.” Upon his return to the front, the remaining portion of the Palmetto Company greeted him warmly and formally resolved that Brooks had been “deprived of the honor of partaking in the glorious achievements of our army, in the vally [sic] of Mexico.” The formal language of the resolution aimed to clear Brooks of any taint of cowardice or wrongdoing.³⁵

Despite the protestation of honor, Brooks had missed his chance at glory. This reality did not stop the anxious South Carolinian from making every possible effort to find a second chance. Whitfield Brooks also continued to promote his son. “He desires that I will write to you & endeavor to interest you in procuring an appointment for him in the event of the increase of the army,” Brooks wrote to the South Carolina Congressman James A. Black in December 1847.

³⁴ Copy of letter from James Davis to Preston S. Brooks, Oct. 7, 1847, Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folder 1, SCL.

³⁵ Roger Jones to Andrew P. Butler, Sept. 23, 1847, and “Resolutions complimentary to Capt. Brooks,” Dec. 6, 1848, Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folder 2, SCL.

The elder Brooks lamented that his son Preston “deeply & sorely feels the loss which he had sustained by being absent in the great battles near the City of Mexico,” adding further that his son “now pants for an opportunity of doing something to repair what he conceives has lost.” The young Brooks hoped for the rank of colonel in one of the units then being reorganized for possible fighting in 1848.

But matters other than Preston’s commission concerned Whitfield. Another son, also named Whitfield Brooks, had died at the Battle of Churubusco. The elder Whitfield hoped to obtain the posthumous rank of lieutenant for his slain son, which was only possible through political connections to his kinsman Senator Andrew Pickens Butler. In another letter to Black, Whitfield candidly remarked of the elderly senator: “I wish you would speak to Butler & tell him that I have asked your cooperation with him. You know that he is sensitive & as my relation he would be offended if I did not manifest confidence in him above any body else. In his feelings I have confidence & distrust nothing but his memory.” For his part, Preston also wrote to Black with an urgent note seeking his aid in a promotion. “Do induce Judge Butler to take hold for me. He has been written to on the subject.” While Whitfield and Preston Brooks trusted their kinsman’s motives, they questioned his “memory” more so. The detail is a significant one given that Butler often quarreled with Charles Sumner over what was said and what was not on the floor of the Senate. Indeed, even a favorable memoirist of Butler’s admitted that the judge was “a careless man about preserving papers that would illustrate his life as a lawyer or a judge.” If Butler’s relatives and friends had reason to distrust his memory, and as early as the 1840s, historians should be equally wary of his public statements, too.³⁶

³⁶ Whitfield Brooks to James A. Black, Dec. 20, 1847, Whitfield Brooks to James A. Black, Jan. 12, 1848, and Preston Brooks to James A. Black, Jan. 13, 1848, Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folder 2, SCL.

The fighting in Mexico had already ended, and soon afterwards, the ratification of the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo in February 1848 left Preston Brooks without the desired officer commission or the chance to fight in active combat. Matters were made even worse by lingering accusations related to Brooks' wartime service record. Abner Blockner, Preston's cousin, wrote him in early January 1848 with distressing news: "I was pained to hear a few days ago from Lusk that Bill Jones had slandered you this summer in his communications to some of your company I mean his Brother. All that I have to say about it is that I will see when I visit Edge and will put a stop to any talk about you as I did last summer in one or two instances."³⁷

Although the war had effectively ended, Brooks continued to serve in the army until the summer. In his capacity as an officer, Captain Brooks clashed with enlisted soldiers of other regiments, most notably the members of the Second Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment. The *Edgefield Advertiser* reported that Brooks "experienced a difficulty," when certain privates "treated him with considerable disrespect." In response, the favorable account went, "he brought them to their senses by a summary chastisement." On the other hand, the accounts from soldiers' diaries reveal the "considerable disrespect" to include pelting Brooks with eggs and laughing derisively at their superior officer. While Brooks managed to avoid bloodshed with the disrespectful Pennsylvania volunteers, the incident is notable for the young man's continued preference for enacting "chastisement." Captain Brooks had learned many lessons during his wartime experience, and chief among them was this: confront those who disrespect you and be not afraid to use force in doing so.³⁸

³⁷ Abner Blockner to Preston S. Brooks, Jan. 4, 1848, Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folder 2, SCL.

³⁸ On Brooks's difficulties with the Pennsylvania regiments, see the *Edgefield Advertiser*, May 17, 1848; and two very useful first-hand accounts in Allan Peskin, ed., *Volunteers: The Mexican War Journals of Private Richard Coulter and Sergeant Thomas Barclay, Company E, Second Pennsylvania Infantry* (Kent, Oh.: Kent State Univ. Press, 1991): 257-58; and Randy W. Hackenburg, *Pennsylvania in the War with Mexico: The Volunteer Regiments* (Shippensburg, Penna.: White Mane Publishing Co., 1992): 81-82.

Like many who felt they were unfairly denied the glory of battle, Brooks had trouble adjusting back to civilian life. By the summer of 1849, two troublesome and related episodes nearly plunged him into another duel. On July 4, the Palmetto Regiment gathered to honor the surviving men with ceremonial sabers. Brooks was not invited and received no sword, insults that rankled the honor-obsessed South Carolinian. He also remained quite attuned to what other men in the regiment publicly said of him. One such man was Milledge Luke Bonham, a fellow denizen of Edgefield District, and an 1834 graduate of South Carolina College (and a very distant cousin). Like Brooks, Bonham had practiced law and had soldiered in the war with Mexico. Unlike Brooks, Bonham successfully endured the privations of climate and conflict and, more importantly, was never sent home. He had, however, been accused of cowardice. While the charge was formally dismissed, Brooks had an opportunity to question Bonham's performance while improving his own standing in the process. The two men exchanged a series of eighteen increasingly heated letters that held the real possibility of bullets, and not just words, as their ultimate outcome.³⁹

The letters between Brooks and Bonham reveal both men to be stubborn and persistent in their beliefs. Brooks admitted that the chief insult was that he had been "unjustly neglected" in "relation to the presentation of Swords on the 4th Inst." In this way, a friend had remarked to Brooks, he and Bonham were "on the same footing," a seemingly deceptive phrase that carried with it a variety of subtle meanings. To this Bonham objected, charging that Brooks went too far in the suggestion that Bonham's honor had been impugned through the court of inquiry. Brooks objected to this misreading, noting that a "soldiers honor is as delicate as a womans, and that any imputation upon it, however false or malicious, was an injury." Further letters exchanged only

³⁹ A helpful account of the Brooks-Bonham affair is given in Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, 30-33.

aggravated the matter. Finally, for the “purpose of continuing our correspondence,” Bonham desired to meet at the dueling grounds on the island in the middle of the Savannah River. This was familiar territory for Brooks, the same ground on which Louis Wigfall had lodged a bullet into his leg eight years earlier. Brooks sheepishly attempted to diffuse the situation, but Bonham persisted and demanded a “hostile meeting.” The incendiary note was never delivered, “by reason of the interposition of Genl Hammond as a mutual friend and with the [approval] of both parties.” Working through his second, Col. Maxcey Gregg, Bonham and Brooks agreed to peaceful terms set by James Henry Hammond, whose reluctant involvement seems to have come at the request of Brooks.⁴⁰

The aftermath of the Brooks-Bonham affair produced more hard feelings than hard blows. A third party observer noted in a letter of August 1, “The difficulty [Bonham] has had with P. Brooks was settled in a manor [sic] entirely satisfactory to himself and his friends.” But the personal troubles were only just beginning for Preston Brooks. On August 1, Martha Caroline Means Brooks, now very pregnant with their fourth child, was thrown from her carriage during an evening ride and suffered a serious compound fracture of her ankle. The accident, coming as it did only a few days after the aborted duel between Brooks and Bonham, brought about a remarkable turn of events. Bonham, in a moment of small-town serendipity, was among the “gentlemen [who] carried [Martha] awhile,” until she reached the comfort of her bed. The next day, a grateful Brooks effused kindness to his former foe in a gushing letter. In a moment of reflection, Brooks also revealed a rare moment of auto-critique: “I have a thoughtless head & immoderate tongue,” he confessed, “but my heart is in the right place and upon my honor the *ill natured* remark was caused by imitation towards others, than yourself...” By all accounts, the

⁴⁰ Preston S. Brooks to Milledge L. Bonham, July 14 and 17, 1849, and Milledge L. Bonham to Preston S. Brooks, July 20 and July 25, 1849, Milledge Luke Bonham Papers, box 1, folders 26 and 27, SCL.

two men resumed cordial relations in the years that followed. In a fitting conclusion to the Brooks-Bonham saga, Bonham was selected in March 1857 to fill the vacated congressional seat caused by Brooks's death.⁴¹

The early 1850s continued the pattern of political conflict, punctured by episodes of violent threats. In June 1851, Brooks returned to politics and ran for the legislature seat from Edgefield District. He summed up his political position to confidant A.T. Traylor: "My experience in life has taught me that the best way to keep from being *run over* is to *run over* some body myself, politically." Successful in his electoral bid, Brooks resumed life as a public figure, open to new kinds of criticism from the press. In 1853, an anonymous editorial, signed only as "Cassius," blasted Brooks for his votes in the legislature. His response was equally blistering, calling for the author to reveal himself and satisfy the honor of the aggrieved. Brooks paid special attention to the perceived insult to his female family members: "You have by imputation, inuendo [sic] and implication, outraged the sensibilities of the females of my family, by publishing, in a newspaper accessible to them, as 'euphuisms,' [sic] what you dare not speak in plainer English." In the veiled language that characterized the code duello, Brooks promised to be "subject to your commands" at a future date, but nothing further came of the letter.⁴²

The importance of defending family members, including extended networks of kinsmen, led Preston Brooks not only onto the dueling grounds and the battlefields of Mexico but to high political office. In 1853, after years of service on the governor's staff, the state legislature, and in the military, the Democratic Party elected Brooks to represent the fourth congressional district of South Carolina. Arriving in Washington for the first time as an elected official, Brooks

⁴¹ Arthur Simpkins to "Madam," 1 Aug. 1849, Brooks Diary; and Preston S. Brooks to Milledge L. Bonham, Aug. 2, 1849, Milledge Luke Bonham Papers, box 1, folder 28, SCL.

⁴² Preston S. Brooks to A. T. Traylor, June 19, 1851, Traylor and McClane Papers, SCL; Circular, Feb. 6, 1853, Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folder 2, SCL.

constructed a new political family, one composed of fellow South Carolinians and other southern Democrats serving in the House and Senate. The early friendships and alliances which Brooks formed with other political men, who though not related by blood, were critical to forming a political family, not altogether different from the kind he enjoyed in Edgefield, the eventual cabal that brought about the caning of Charles Sumner in 1856.

No Way to Settle Disputes

In 1856, social life in Washington still offered an outlet for men of differing party views to acquaint themselves with one another. The breakdown of social relations between Charles Sumner and Preston Brooks was made more extraordinary in that, at least in recent memory, no member of Congress had ever attacked another member of Congress outside of an active debate on the floor. Several distinct factors, when taken together, help to explain why Preston Brooks took the next step of caning Sumner on the floor of the Senate. These include his understanding of proper manhood, the salience of party affiliation, and the influence of alcohol. Primary to all these is the nature of male friendship and comradeship that allowed for three Southerners to cabal against one Northerner. The elements of the plot, together, reveal fundamental differences between not only politicians, but American men of different cultural and social backgrounds.

The two primary associates of Preston Brooks in the caning of Charles Sumner were Laurence M. Keitt and Henry A. Edmundson. Previous biographers of the two men have claimed that Keitt especially was eager to see Sumner chastised, but few historians have explored how the early biographies of Keitt and Edmundson prepared them for the roles they played in the caning of Charles Sumner. A careful study reveals these two men to be not only dedicated to fighting the antislavery element in Congress, but also given toward a clannish,

though ultimately cowardly, mindset. Although each exhibited the characteristic bluster of elite Southern manhood, Keitt and Edmundson relied more on bluff than action. What Keitt and Edmundson needed was a man with the courage, or perhaps foolhardiness, to be the first to commit a violent act from which there was no return to civility.⁴³

Born October 4, 1824, Laurence Massillon Keitt enrolled at South Carolina College in the fall of 1839, not yet fifteen years old. Like Brooks, Keitt had attended the common schools of the state, including one year of preparation at the Mt. Zion Academy in Winnsboro. Prior to Mt. Zion, he had been educated at the St. Matthews Academy, where, one teacher later recalled, he was “famous for foot races, the gift of gab, and for never wincing when...flogged.” A sensitive young man and a gifted student, Keitt easily graduated from South Carolina College in 1843. As with so many elite men of this generation, he next pursued the practice of law.⁴⁴

Like Brooks, Keitt began his political career at an early age. His first elected position was to the South Carolina House of Representatives in 1848. In that capacity, Keitt paid special attention to the preservation of South Carolina’s archives and records. A self-described dabbler, Keitt was convinced that “in the tenth century white men occupied Carolina.” Keitt’s mythical interpretation of the pre-colonial past was part of a wider turn toward the medieval in the imaginations of antebellum South Carolinians. This bit of apocryphal history notwithstanding,

⁴³ Biographer John H. Merchant wrote, “Keitt demanded without success to be allowed to do the job.” The source for such a claim, which comes from a line in *Scribner’s Monthly* written posthumously in 1874 about the life of Charles Sumner, does not reference any such conversation between Brooks and Keitt about who would have the honor of caning Sumner. Elmer Don Herd, the earliest biographer of Keitt, also believed that Keitt and Edmundson “offered Brooks support and even suggested that they be allowed to perform the task.” Herd’s source is equally enigmatic, as the testimony of Henry Edmundson printed in the *Congressional Globe* states exactly the opposite: “Mr. Keitt and myself never had any conversation upon the subject, and I know nothing in reference to his having any knowledge of Mr. Brook’s intentions....” Merchant, “Laurence M. Keitt,” 103; A.B. Johnson, “Recollections of Sumner,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 8, no. 4 (Aug. 1874), 482; Herd, “Chapters from the Life of a Southern Chevalier,” 81; “Testimony of Henry Edmundson before House Investigation Committee,” *Congressional Globe*, 34th Congress, 1st Session, 1361-63.

⁴⁴ F.H. Foster to Laurence M. Keitt, Jan. 26, 1859, Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, DUL; Merchant, “Laurence M. Keitt,” 12

Keitt sustained a degree of practicality in his attitude toward historical preservation, and he successfully fought for a fire-proof building to contain the records of the state. In December 1851, Keitt presided over the laying of the cornerstone of the State House and Archives, where he declared that South Carolina must preserve her records “so that some sons of hers thereafter, may pay the debt so long due to her.”⁴⁵

But unlike Brooks’s, Laurence Keitt’s personal life was quite unsettled. A bachelor yet in the middle 1850s, Keitt was a romantic, called by one historian a “practicing poet,” who preferred a brand of Hotspur politics that aimed to sunder the filial attachments of the Union. A man proud of his state and her history to the extreme, Laurence Keitt did not easily suffer insults. “Young, impetuous, and intensely ambitious,” he was, in the words of South Carolina historian Harold Schultz, the “archetypical” fire-eater. The “Harry Hotspur of the South,” Keitt employed bombastic oratory and routinely invoked slavery in debates on the floor the U.S. House of Representatives. In this he was highly successful. As one contemporary observer noted, “No one gets the better of him.” From his election to the House in 1853 to his resignation in 1860, Keitt was one of only a handful of active ideologues for Southern rights and secession in the Congress.⁴⁶

Like Brooks and Keitt, Henry Alonzo Edmundson emerged from an elite plantation background, though in the remote reaches of Montgomery County, Virginia. Born to Henry Edmundson and Margaret King Edmundson around 1814, Henry soon came to know the Fotheringay plantation on the Roanoke River as a nearly lifelong home. But his father had

⁴⁵ Merchant, “Laurence M. Keitt,” 9; Herd, “Chapters from the Life of a Southern Chevalier,” 12, 15; Laurence M. Keitt to Susan Sparks, Sept. 19, [1855], Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, DUL. On the obsession with the medieval period in antebellum South Carolina, see Watson, *Normans and Saxons*; and Osterweiss, *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South*.

⁴⁶ Harold Schultz, *Nationalism and Sectionalism in South Carolina, 1852-1860: A Study of the Movement for Southern Independence* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1950), 16; diary entry from Jan. 5, 1862, in *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, ed. Woodward, 274.

interests beyond agriculture. The elder Edmundson epitomized the often overlooked capitalist tendency of Southerners, especially those along the western frontier of the Old South, to find business opportunities in the changing economies of the times. Edmundson helped to develop the Allegheny Turnpike in the 1820s. He would pass on his interest in the development of Montgomery County to his children, especially his two younger sons Henry Alonzo and James Preston.⁴⁷

With his father's wealth increasing yearly, Henry Edmundson could afford to send James Preston Edmundson to Georgetown College, a largely southern institution located on the Potomac River. In 1836, Henry Alonzo followed his younger brother James Preston to the college. At Georgetown, Henry Alonzo, who was relatively advanced in his studies, still remained at his father's distant command: "I wish to know from you whether you would prefer my studying law or medicine," he wrote. His actions, meanwhile, proved him to be an aspiring young lawyer, when he "sat for two hours each day in the gallery of the Senate Chamber." In the social arena, Edmundson formed close friendships with fellow students and participated in two competing literary societies, the Phileleutherian Society and the Philodemic Society. When the two societies clashed over membership standards, Edmundson was assigned by the Philodemic to a mediating committee (nothing came of the effort). Ever dutiful to his father's wishes,

⁴⁷ Wood, "Henry Edmundson, the Alleghany Turnpike, and 'Fotheringay' Plantation, 1805-1847." Some confusion exists about Henry Alonzo Edmundson's birthdate. The *Biographical Directory of the American Congress* gives June 14, 1814, as the date; an obituary at the time of his death (Dec. 1890) lists him as seventy-seven years old; and his tombstone states "aged seventy-five years." The eldest son, James King Edmundson (1809-1876), graduated in 1826 from Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, and subsequently moved to Nashville, Tennessee, where he married Matilda George Wilson; see *Catalogue of the Officers and Alumni of Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia, 1749-1888* (Baltimore: J. Murphy & Co., 1888), 79; Edmundson obituary notice in *Nashville Daily American*, Oct. 29, 1876; about Edmundson's children, J.T. McGill, "George Wilson," *Tennessee Historical Magazine* 4, no. 3 (Sept. 1918): 157-160; and the postscript in which Henry Alonzo "rejoiced to hear of Johns marriage" in Henry A. Edmundson to Henry Edmundson, Feb. 10, 1837, Edmundson Family Papers, VHS.

Edmundson left Georgetown without a degree in the fall of 1837, determined to obtain his legal license, which he accomplished in the following year under the tutelage of the former governor James P. Preston.⁴⁸

By the 1840s, Edmundson was on a path that would take him to politics, and eventually to his association with Preston Brooks. He first practiced law in Salem, Virginia, where he met and soon married Mary A. Lewis, with whom he had four children. In contrast to Brooks and Keitt, Edmundson first experienced politics in the proto-capitalist environment of southwestern Virginia. He first turned to politics for reasons of public standing and service, becoming involved with the Democratic Party in Roanoke County and representing his region at the party's state convention in 1844. He was subsequently elected Attorney of the Commonwealth of Virginia in the following year. In 1848, he defeated William Ballard Preston, a former associate of his father and a prominent Whig, for the congressional seat in Roanoke County. After six years in the House, Edmundson had moved him strongly into the camp of fellow southern

⁴⁸ James Preston Edmundson (born around 1815) attended Georgetown College before Henry Alonzo, obtaining the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1835, and possibly becoming a member of the Philodemic Society. Henry Alonzo did not attend the college until 1836, where he remained a single year. Henry Alonzo became associated with the Phileleutherian Society, through at least February 1837 when he delivered an oration on the occasion of Washington's birthday. At this time, Henry also came to know his brother's college friend and classmate Edward Doyle of New York. On April 14, 1837, Edmundson was accepted as a member of Philodemic Society, though he planned to leave the college by the following September. See Henry A. Edmundson to Henry Edmundson, Sept. 23, 1836, Feb. 10, 1837, and July 26, [1837], and Henry A. Edmundson to Joseph A. Logan, Oct. 14, [ca. 1837], Edmundson Family Papers, VHS; "Constitution of the Philodemic Society" (1832), GUA; Henry Alonzo Edmundson, "An oration delivered before the Phileleutherian Society, of Georgetown College, on the twenty-second of February, 1837" (1837); "Minutes of the Philodemic Society," GUA. For the student culture and the literary societies at Georgetown during Edmundson's student years, see John G. Shea, *Memorial of the First Centenary of Georgetown College, D.C.* (Washington, D.C.: P. F. Collier, 1891, 110-115; John M. Daley, *Georgetown University: Origin and Early Years* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1957), 234-36, 268; Eric M. George, "The Cultivation of Eloquence at Georgetown College: A History of the Philodemic Society from 1830-1890" in *Swift Potomac's Lovely Daughter: Two Centuries at Georgetown through Students' Eyes*, ed. Joseph Durkin (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1990) 110-120; and Robert E. Curran, *The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1993), 1:200-202. Of interest, Edmundson's own son, Henry A. Edmundson, Jr., became a physician.

Democrats. During that time, Edmundson shared little personal or political connection with the northern members of his party.⁴⁹

Little is known about Keitt's and Edmundson's respective affairs of honor, or if either man participated in one, prior to their time in Congress. Once in Congress, however, each man revealed a tendency toward violent conflict. In one notable moment, Edmundson nearly pulled a bowie knife on representative Lewis D. Campbell of Ohio during an evening session of the House on May 12, 1854. The New York *Tribune* reported that Edmundson was "armed to the teeth, and under the influence of liquor." James Ford Rhodes later recorded that "among the gentlemen who effectually assisted the speaker in preventing a disgraceful brawl were Aiken and Keitt, of South Carolina." From this incident, Keitt appears to be the peacemaker and Edmundson a drunken instigator. In another incident, Keitt helped to prevent further bloodshed in a dispute involving William Douglas Wallach, the editor and owner of the *Washington Daily Evening Star*, and the Virginia Congressmen William "Extra Billy" Smith. The editor and the Congressmen were wrestling after a dispute, when Wallach bit Smith's thumb. Keitt, joined by the Virginia Representative Thomas Bocock, came to Smith's aid, saying, "This is no way for gentlemen to settle their disputes," forcing Wallach's jaws apart to release Smith's thumb.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ William Ballard Preston, who had lived in Columbia, South Carolina, in the late 1820s, was a member of the Virginia wing of the Preston clan. The South Carolina Prestons included William Campbell Preston, a former Senator and a member of the board of directors at South Carolina College in the 1830s and 1840s and later its president from 1845 to 1851. Preston S. Brooks knew William C. Preston and his kinsmen; most likely this familial connection provided an initial link between Brooks and Henry A. Edmundson. McKnight, "Henry Alonzo Edmundson," 13, 59; Ernest M. Lander, Jr., "The Calhoun-Preston Feud, 1836-1842," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 59, no. 1 (Jan. 1958): 24-37; Dorman, *The Prestons of Smithfield and Greenfield in Virginia*, 202-204, 260-64.

⁵⁰ New York *Tribune*, May 31, 1854; James F. Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850* (New York: Macmillan, 1892), 1:486. For a less complete rendering of the dispute between Edmundson and Campbell, see also the proceedings of May 11, 1854, in the *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, 1183. On the Smith-Wallach contest, see Poore, *Perley's Reminiscences*, 2:466.

The organization of the House and the selection of a Speaker in 1855 to 1856 once again brought about intractable debates. Keitt led the charge to support a candidate friendly to Southern interests, and in the process, he emerged as a fiercer firebrand than ever before. When New York representative Russell Sage hinted at the “standard of morality” in South Carolina, Keitt offered a veiled threat to answer him “in a specific way.” The two men reconciled, and Keitt even seemed to moderate somewhat. “I hold on to my seat,” he confided to Susanna Sparks in a January 1856 letter. In the end, the Massachusetts Republican Nathaniel Banks was elected, setting the stage for future conflict over the selection of the Speaker.⁵¹

While the three men who caballed to cane Charles Sumner emerged from genteel Southern backgrounds, mostly associated with agricultural concerns, they differed in other ways. Two of the men (Brooks and Edmundson) were married, while the other, Keitt, was a struggling bachelor. Keitt later became known for his courtship of Harriet Lane, niece of President James Buchanan, but in 1856, he eagerly pursued the attention of Susan Sparks. By 1856, Keitt was close enough to Edmundson to report to Sparks: “There is a story here that Miss Ada Cutts will take the silken string--the fortunate gentleman Mr. Edmundson of Virginia.” While this rumor would not prove to be true, the rakish Keitt strayed abreast of all the romantic rumors in Washington. Keitt did so while “still at Willard’s,” where he reported, “I see that a great many ladies are at the hotel.” Keitt also attended balls, one notably given by William Aiken, and agreed to help officiate a wedding with Stephen A. Douglas. The Brookses also made an early acquaintance of Edmundson. Brooks even allowed Edmundson to accompany Martha Brooks to dinner at the White House.⁵²

⁵¹ On Keitt and the Congressional deadlock of 1856, see *Congressional Globe*, 34th Congress, 1st Session, 219, 228; Laurence M. Keitt to Susan Sparks, Jan. 10, 1856, Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, DUL.

⁵² Laurence M. Keitt to Susan Sparks, March 23, April 13, 1856, Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, DUL.

In addition to the difference in marital status, the three men also differed in their lodgings and social intercourse about the capital. At first, Preston Brooks brought Martha and their youngest child Marie, to Washington. The newly elected congressman followed a well-known route. “We went with the other representatives from S.C. to Baltimore to do our shopping and then to Washington,” Martha recorded many years later in her diary. Once in Washington, they boarded at Willard’s Hotel and “made many pleasant acquaintances.” The Brookses dutifully engaged in the social calls that defined Washington life. They “attended the levees at the White House in the East Room,” Martha recalled and “attended the President’s reception on Thursday.” About the new chief executive, Martha was highly complimentary, even familial: “President Pierce was very gracious and claimed us as relatives through his wife who was Miss Jane Means Appleton.”⁵³ Martha recalled that the Pierces “called upon them specially at night to discuss family relations.” But Martha’s presence in the Capitol does not seem to have been meant to be permanent; by the spring of 1856, she had returned to South Carolina for the remainder of the Congressional term. By 1856, Brooks was back at Brown’s Hotel, still a surrogate home for many Southern representatives.⁵⁴

Although married, Edmundson did not bring his family to the capital. At the start of his congressional career, he tended to mess with other Southerners. Of all his messmates, Edmundson was closest to John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky, the future vice-president under James Buchanan. Unlike Edmundson, Laurence Keitt spent his first year in Washington at Willard’s Hotel, where he shared lodgings with Sam Houston, Lewis Cass, and other notables. Keitt enjoyed a busy social schedule in his earlier years, one that would only become more active over time. “Washington now is lively. There are dances and routs every night,” Keitt reported

⁵³ Martha Caroline Means Brooks diary, Preston Smith Brooks Papers, SCL.

⁵⁴ United States Congress, *Congressional Directory for the First Sessions of the Thirty-Third Congress of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., 1853), 50; Brooks diary, SCL.

to Susan Sparks. He also spent time with one Miss Emory, a niece of Charles Sumner's friend Thomas Gold Appleton, with whom Keitt described his relations as "intimate" (an indication that the connections between South Carolina and Massachusetts were never so strained as to prevent social intercourse with members of the opposite sex). In his second term in the Congress, Keitt lodged at the Kirkwood House, formerly the Fuller Hotel, with fourteen other representatives and one senator, including New York's William M. "Boss" Tweed.⁵⁵

While Washington society delighted Edmundson and Keitt, the public men of the city often disappointed them. Laurence Keitt sneered, "Our public men are weak; they do not come near my standards of what they should be in scholarship or learning or cultivation." The scholarly, and not a little conceited, Keitt believed that South Carolina had won power on the federal level "by the intellect of its sons." Towards that end, Keitt spent time in the off-season visiting with the various political figures of South Carolina. "I go tomorrow to Brooks for a couple of days, a couple then with Judge Butler, and then a couple with Col. Pickens," he told Susanna Sparks in July 1855 (though he ended up only visiting with Brooks). Keitt regularly visited with the Southern writer William Gilmore Simms, in whose company he discussed literary and historical matters. Always Keitt focused on the "annals of the past" as a way to avoid the politics of the day. In reality, these visits focused on the political as much as anything else, and they were important in planning for future activities in Washington.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ United States Congress, *Congressional Directory for the First Sessions of the Thirty-Third Congress of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C., 1854), 61; *Washington City and Georgetown Directory* (1855), 82-86; James W. Goode, *Capital Losses: A Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2003), 388.

⁵⁶ Laurence M. Keitt to Susan Sparks, July 11, 16, and Sept. 19, 1855, Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, DUL. About Simms and his conception of manhood, see John Mayfield, "'The Soul of a Man!': William Gilmore Simms and the Myths of Southern Manhood," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 477-500.

As it had in the past, the contingent from South Carolina traveled together to Washington. By November 1855, Representative Keitt and Senator Butler were together at Orangeburg Courthouse. Keitt forwarded along a letter from Butler to Susan Sparks, noting that “Butler, I believe, agrees with me” about a recent publication by the writer William Gilmore Simms. Later that month, Keitt met up with the Brooks clan in Columbia, to prepare for the trip northward. “Ham Brooks [brother of Preston] is here,” Keitt gossiped to Susan Sparks, “and I hear confidently he and Miss Mary Adams mingle destinies in January.” But, these political friendships were not enough for Keitt, who continued to entice Sparks to join him in Washington. He assured her that the climate in Washington was “as good as ours” and she could “advance yourself in drawing which would be useful, and also a pleasure to you in Europe.” Ultimately, Sparks did not come to Washington that year or for many more afterwards, and although Martha Caroline Means Brooks joined her husband for a brief period, she too had headed home by Christmas.⁵⁷

The shared feelings between Brooks and Keitt continued strong through 1856. In February, Keitt spoke at an anti-Know Nothing rally in Georgetown, only to be stricken by illness, diagnosed as pneumonia, soon thereafter. With his own servant also sick in bed, Preston and Martha Brooks tended to their fellow South Carolinians. The Brookses also took an active interest in the budding romance between Keitt and Sparks. In a postscript to another letter, Keitt confided, “Mrs. Brooks has just sent me a letter from her mother with this expression, ‘How mean Miss Sparks has acted toward Mr. Keitt.’” The two men had become close friends, and for both Brooks and Keitt, such associations mattered practically more than any other.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Laurence M. Keitt to Susan Sparks, Nov. 8 and 29, 1855, Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, DUL; Preston S. Brooks to James L. Orr, Nov. 10, 1855, Orr and Patterson Family Papers, box 1, folder 2, SHC.

⁵⁸ Laurence M. Keitt to Susan Sparks, Feb. 29, March 9, 1856, Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, DUL. On May 8, California representative Philemont T. Herbert killed Thomas Keating, an Irish waiter at

A Meeting Casual Altogether

The Kansas debate erupted in the House and Senate in the spring of 1856. Southern supporters were raising money to send to pro-slavery settlers in the far-off territory, and the six South Carolina congressmen gave speeches of a militaristic kind. Characteristically, Brooks blustered at the chance to send armed men to Kansas, pledging to give “as many dollars as you have men under pledge to go to Kansas and to remain for two years” to an eager military commander interested in mustering men for the territory. For his part, Keitt averred less aggressively to the *Charleston Mercury* that he would “cheerfully and earnestly aid in any mode which may be adopted to colonize Kansas by the South.” Northerners were equally resolute in their determination to arm anti-slavery settlers, sending along scores of precision rifles dubbed “Beecher’s bibles” for abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher.⁵⁹

In this charged climate, Charles Sumner delivered his philippic, the “Crime Against Kansas” speech. At the outset, Brooks had not originally intended to be among the audience in the Senate gallery. Summoned to the Senate to hear the ongoing philippic, he was subsequently, in the apologetic words of Andrew Pickens Butler, “excited and stung by the street rumors and the street commentaries, and by the conversations in the parlors, where even ladies pronounced a judgment.” Butler further described the insult in gendered terms: “He could not go into a parlor, or drawing-room, or to a dinner party, where he did not find an implied reproach that there was

Willard’s Hotel. Herbert was a close colleague of Keitt, and he dutifully supported the man through the subsequent vote in the House. While he found the shooting to be a “lamentable affair,” Keitt was more disturbed that Herbert had the blood of an “inferior,” the Irishman and waiter Keating, upon him. The racialism of the antebellum Southerners did not abate once in Washington. *Congressional Globe*, 34th Congress, 1st Session, 1228; Laurence M. Keitt to Susan Sparks, May 10, 1856, Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, DUL.

⁵⁹ Preston S. Brooks to E.B. Bell, Dec. 31, 1855, in *Charleston Mercury*, February 4, 1856; letter from Laurence M. Keitt, Feb. 22, 1856, in *Charleston Mercury*, Mar. 5, 1856; see also Elmer L. Craik, “Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1858,” *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1919-1922* 15 (Topeka, Kan., 1923), 413-14.

an unmanly submission to an insult to his State and his countrymen.” Butler may have been exaggerating the extent to which “street commentaries” and parlor conversation weighed upon Brooks, but he was certainly correct in the basic thrust of his argument. If the past biography of Preston Brooks had proven one constant characteristic, it would be this: an inability to bear the threat of unmanly submission.⁶⁰

Even though Brooks was present only for the first day of the speech, he immediately knew that he must somehow avenge the insult. First, he took the deliberate step to read the printed version of the speech, perhaps to ensure that he had not misheard Sumner or perhaps to allow for the spoken slander to become printed libel. “As soon as I had read the speech,” Brooks later recorded, “I felt it to be my duty to inflict some return for the insult to my State and my relative.” Brooks specifically found the “objectionable passages” to be found on the “5th, 29th, and 30th pages,” notably the sections that questioned South Carolina’s record in the Revolutionary War and insulted Andrew Pickens Butler through salacious personal characterizations, particularly the passage in which Sumner likened slavery to a harlot. Had Sumner not prepared his speech for publication, Brooks’s temper would have cooled somewhat. Instead, Brooks read and reread the printed speech and resolved to respond to Sumner.⁶¹

The matter might have yet ended there, had not Brooks taken the step of sharing his frustrations with his fellow Southern congressmen. They were, naturally, entirely sympathetic to

⁶⁰ Speech of Andrew Pickens Butler, June 14, 1856, in *Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 1st Sess., Appendix, 632.

⁶¹ *Alleged Assault upon Senator Sumner (House Report, No. 182, 34 Cong., 1 Sess.)*, provides useful testimony from the subsequent Congressional investigation. Brooks’s statement was first printed in “Statement by Preston S. Brooks,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 61 (Oct. 1927-Jun. 1928): 221-23; the original handwritten speech may be found in the Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folder 4, SCL. About antebellum Southerners desire to settle personal matters outside of the courts, see Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1995), 3-36; Williams, *Vogues in Villainy*, 53-59.

the problem. “Has the chivalry of South Carolina escaped, and is this to be a tame submission?” Andrew Pickens Butler asked rhetorically. The question was a burning one to Brooks. The options for reply were multiple, though mostly impractical. He could sue Sumner for libel, but law suits were rarely utilized by followers of the southern code of honor. He could challenge Sumner to a duel, but Brooks knew that Sumner, a Northerner with no skill with weapons, would not accept. Worse still, Brooks feared that a formal challenge to Sumner might subject him to “legal penalties more severe than would be imposed for simple assault and battery.” Brooks later expressed his frustration that “the moral tone of a mind that would lead a man to become a Black Republican would make him incapable of courage.”⁶²

The desire to chastise Sumner was altogether different from the technicalities of how to approach and assault the larger and stronger man from Massachusetts. Here, the scheming of Keitt and Edmundson proved useful. From what can be reconstructed from Edmundson’s testimony given before a Congressional investigation (Keitt avoided testifying altogether), Edmundson helped Brooks determine the exact plan of attack. Keitt’s role is somewhat more ambiguous, but he certainly knew about the plan in advance and most likely encouraged Brooks to follow through with the assault. At the very least, Keitt agreed to be present to observe the encounter.

The plot began simply enough. On the day after Sumner’s speech, Edmundson, while on the way to the House, “accidentally” met his fellow representative at the foot of the steps leading to the Capitol. Edmundson had heard from Robert M. T. Hunter, the messmate of Andrew P. Butler, that Brooks “had complained of language used on the first day of the speech.” As Brooks

⁶² Speech of Andrew Pickens Butler, June 14, 1856, in *Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 1st Sess., Appendix, 630-631; *Daily Carolina Times* (Charleston, S.C.), Aug. 30, 1856, as quoted in Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 291; “Resignation of Preston S. Brooks,” July 14, 1856 in *Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 1st Sess., Appendix, 832.

was walking toward the Senate, Edmundson accosted Brooks with the cheeky remark: “You are going the wrong way for the discharge of your duties.” Immediately, the two men began to talk privately. Brooks revealed his desire to “punish” Sumner, unless “he made an ample apology.” As the two men were sitting near the Capitol grounds, Brooks went further still. Edmundson later remembered that “it was time for southern men to stop this coarse abuse used by the Abolitionists against the southern people and States, and that he should not feel that he was representing his State properly if he permitted such things to be said: that he learned Mr. Sumner intended to do this thing days before he made his speech; that he did it deliberately, and he thought he ought to punish him.” Brooks exhorted Edmundson to “merely to be present” when the proposed encounter occurred. The meeting was, Edmundson later insisted, “casual altogether.”⁶³

In this first conversation with Brooks, Edmundson did not mention any desire on Brooks’s part to avenge his absent relative, Butler, but only his state and the Southern people more generally. Based on the prior relationship between Brooks and Butler, this omission reaffirms the notion that Brooks was motivated primarily, perhaps solely, by a desire to avenge the honor of his state. The insult, in Brooks’s mind, was both a matter of honor and manhood. Edmundson later recalled that Brooks had misremembered the exact insult used by Sumner against South Carolina. As Edmundson recalled, “I think the language he repeated that Mr. Sumner had used towards South Carolina was: ‘Disgracefully impotent during the Revolution, and rendered still more so since on account of slavery.’” In fact, as Howell Cobb immediately pointed out, the language used by Sumner was “shamefully imbecile.” Brooks’ substitution of “disgracefully impotent” for “shamefully imbecile” shifted the focus from the paralytic condition of Butler to a question of Brooks’ own reproductive potential as a man. Not only was Southern

⁶³ *Alleged Assault upon Senator Sumner*, 59, 61-62.

honor generally at stake but more importantly, Preston Brooks felt his own manhood to be on the line.⁶⁴

The two men waited outside the Capitol until twelve thirty in the afternoon. Edmundson, whom Brooks later characterized as a “personal friend,” was joined by Laurence Keitt and the Arkansas Senator Robert Ward Johnson. “Neither of them was informed of my purpose during that day,” Brooks testified later. Johnson does not seem to have been involved any further in the plot behind this point, but Keitt must have known something to be amiss, for both he and the South Carolina Representative James Orr met with Brooks at his hotel that same evening around ten o’clock. By that time, Brooks had also heard rumors, false as it turned out, that Sumner was armed in preparation for an assault. When asked by Edmundson how he would prepare himself, Brooks replied, “I have nothing but my cane.” It would prove sufficient.⁶⁵

What Keitt and Orr next said to Brooks is not recorded, but certainly, there would have been discussion about Sumner’s speech. Most likely, James Orr, who was a leader of the Cooperationist wing of the Democratic Party in South Carolina, counseled caution. Although Orr was never implicated in the events that followed, he remained faithful to Brooks, serving as his attorney in the trials that followed (indeed, the two shared a cordial friendship and Masonic principles alike). Later that night, Keitt, Edmundson, and Brooks may have gone to Gautier’s restaurant, where Sumner frequently dined, to enact the chastisement in public, but such an account seems unlikely. More likely, the trio partook of alcohol and discussed their plans for the subsequent day.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Alleged Assault upon Senator Sumner*, 61.

⁶⁵ “Statement by Preston S. Brooks,” Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folder 4, SCL; *Alleged Assault upon Senator Sumner*, 61.

⁶⁶ On Orr, see Roger P. Lemuis, *James L. Orr and the Sectional Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: Univ. Press of America, 1979), esp. 31, 52-53; and Donald H. Breese, “James L. Orr, Calhoun, and the Cooperationist Tradition in South Carolina,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 80, no. 4 (Oct. 1979): 273-85. The

The next day, Thursday, May 22, Henry Edmundson once again met Preston Brooks, this time “sitting in the gatehouse of the Capitol grounds at the entrance from Pennsylvania avenue, alone” around eleven o’clock in the morning. Edmundson wryly observed, “You are looking out.” Brooks irritably replied that he was looking for Sumner and “that he had scarcely slept any the night before, thinking of it...” Deprived of sleep and perhaps recovering from the effects of alcohol, Brooks had concocted a plan of intercepting Sumner before he reached the Senate. The plan required Brooks to walk up the many steps of the Capitol, which in the sobering opinion of Edmundson “would be an imprudent course...the exertion and fatigue of passing up so many flights of steps would render him unable to contend with Mr. Sumner, should a personal conflict take place.” Another, unstated reason for Brook’s fatigue in climbing the steps was the bullet lodged in his left leg from Louis Wigfall’s dueling pistol, which required him to walk with a cane and slowly at that. As with his ill health in the war with Mexico, a previous affair of honor was once again affecting the course of a future one.⁶⁷

Edmundson’s plan made far more sense, as it gave the physically weaker Brooks the advantages of surprising Sumner inside the Senate chamber without facing shortness of breath. Brooks agreed with Edmundson, and the two men headed up the stairs to the Capitol. Inside the House chamber, various congressmen were eulogizing the death of their colleague, the Missourian John Gaines Miller. Edmundson left the House for the Senate, where Mr. Miller’s death was announced and, as was customary, the Senate adjourned. A restive Brooks remained and took a seat in the Senate chamber. “As I was passing near him,” Edmundson recalled with a characteristic bit of drollery, “I asked him if he was a senator?” But Brooks was in no laughing mood and announced that “he would stand this thing no longer; he would send to Mr. Sumner to

only source to make the claim for the trio scouting Gautier’s restaurant the evening before the caning is “Recollections of Charles Sumner,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 7 (Aug. 1874), 482.

⁶⁷ *Alleged Assault upon Senator Sumner*, 59.

retire outside the chamber.” Once again, Edmundson intervened in Brooks’s plan, suggesting Brooks ought instead to enter the chamber itself and confront Sumner there. Brooks immediately saw the logic of Edmundson’s idea and agreed to act accordingly. One further problem remained. Brooks had earlier expressed a strong desire that no ladies be present for the upcoming interview, and yet, one lady persisted in the chamber. Finally, after much time had passed, the lady left the chamber, clearing the way for Brooks.⁶⁸

As if on cue, Edmundson encountered Laurence M. Keitt and held a brief conversation with him. Although Edmundson later claimed to have no prior knowledge of the events that followed, he knew enough to approach Keitt directly outside the small rotunda of the Senate chamber and propose that “we should go down [the] street,” a curious proposal indeed. But unlike the cagey Edmundson, Keitt was committed to seeing the deed through and in person. “No,” he said, “I cannot leave till Brooks does.” Unfortunately for Keitt, he was detained in conversation by a constituent, Dr. John F. G. Mittag, who had spotted the congressman behind the president’s chair on the speaker’s platform. It was “my impression,” Edmundson finally admitted to the Congressional investigating committee that “an interview would take place; and that, perhaps, influenced me in remaining longer in and near the Senate chamber than I otherwise should have done.” The evidence is circumstantial but telling: both Edmundson and Keitt knew that Brooks was going to approach Sumner. Edmundson, worried about being associated with the encounter, revealed the bluff of his previous false starts on the floor of the House and cautiously left the scene. Keitt, the former peacemaker, brooked no such concerns and stood

⁶⁸ *Alleged Assault upon Senator Sumner*, 60.

righteously by his countryman. He would not let the encounter unfold by any other standard than the greatest attention to Southern honor.⁶⁹

While Preston Brooks pondered his future actions and Laurence Keitt watched intently inside the chamber, Henry Edmundson nervously mulled outside the Senate chamber. Edmundson spoke with one other person before the caning, Arkansas Senator Robert Ward Johnson, the same senator who had joined Keitt at their afternoon meeting with Brooks and Edmundson the day before, and who therefore also likely knew something dramatic was about to take place. Edmundson “propounded the question” to Johnson and asked “if there would be any impropriety, should an altercation occur between Mr. Brooks and Mr. Sumner, of its taking place in the Senate chamber, the Senate having adjourned at the time?” Edmundson further said that “the insult was given there, and that might be looked upon as the proper place to resent it.” Although no record of Johnson’s reply remains, the wealthy Southerner and future secessionist, who had already encountered Brooks and Edmundson together the day before, did not object strenuously. In fact, few observers of the events that followed would later express remorse at what was about to take place.⁷⁰

Arguments vs. Clubs

Preston Brooks approached Charles Sumner, who was seated at his Senate desk, and began to utter the words that he had prepared in his mind. “Mr. Sumner,” he began, “I have read your speech with care and as much impartiality as was possible and I feel it my duty to tell you that you have libeled my State and slandered a relative who is aged and absent and I am come to

⁶⁹ *Alleged Assault upon Senator Sumner*, 63; J.F.G. Mittag to the Editor, May 23, 1856, *Charleston Courier*, June 2, 1856.

⁷⁰ *Alleged Assault upon Senator Sumner*, 60; James M. Woods, “Richard Ward Johnson,” *American National Biography Online*; Elsie M. Lewis, “Robert Ward Johnson: Militant Spokesman of the Old South-West,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 13 (1954): 16-30.

punish you for it.” He probably did not manage to finish the entirety of this speech, before an uncontrollable rage overtook him. Brooks struck Sumner over the head with a cane, repeatedly—“30 first rate stripes,” he later crowed to his brother—until the stick broke into fragments. Senators Crittenden, Toombs, and Douglas all watched, each unable or unwilling to intercede in the melee. Only the restraining hand of Ambrose Murray of New York prevented Brooks from continuing to strike Sumner, but the harm had already been done. “Towards the last,” Brooks later relished, “he bellowed like a calf.” A piece of the cane was noticed to have recoiled from the impact of the attack and to have caused a superficial cut along Brooks’s eye; the bleeding received immediate attention. By one thirty on the afternoon of May 22, 1856, Brooks and Keitt walked out of the Capitol together, mutually exhilarated with the outcome of the previous hour.⁷¹

To the public, the assault appeared pre-mediated and brutally executed. In reality, Brooks’s decision to cane Sumner was far less calculated in its design. One major contributing factor to the caning was alcohol, as Brooks had been drinking the night before (and possibly the morning of) the caning. Gerrit Smith, a staunch temperance activist in addition to a Free Soiler from New York, believed fervently in the substance’s ill effects on Brooks. Brooks had “allowed me to speak freely to him of his habit of drinking liquor,” Smith remembered, adding, “But for liquor he would never have committed his enormous crime.” As unusual as Smith’s familiarity with Brooks may seem, the one-term congressmen from New York customarily hosted Thomas Hart Benton, Stephen Douglas, Charles Sumner, Preston Brooks, Salmon Chase, and Alexander Stephens, among dozens of other notables during his two years in Washington. Neither was Smith alone in his assessment that liquor lay at the heart of the caning of Charles

⁷¹ Preston Smith Brooks to Ham Brooks, May 23, 1856, Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folder 3, SCL; *Alleged Assault upon Senator Sumner*, 38-40, 48, 50, 71. For good accounts of the caning itself, see Hoffer, *The Caning*, 1-35; and Puleo, *The Caning*, 109-117.

Sumner. The *New-York Daily Times* also cited the theme of alcohol consumption, noting that Brooks was “excited with wine, of which he had been drinking freely, and that the first blow struck roused all the demon within him, and left him no longer in possession of his judgment or self-control.”⁷²

The language of the “demon” echoes other temperance messages of the day, especially those that concerned themselves with the loss of manhood. As the temperance historian Elaine Franz Parsons notes, the “maleness of the subject of the drunkard narrative was central to the story’s logic.” Gerrit Smith’s mini-narrative of Brooks’ life emphasized how a “pleasant man” could become a criminal through drink. The *Times* reporter was less charitable, adding, “Whether this report be true or not, there is nothing in it at all inconsistent with probability, or with the character of Col. Brooks.” The turn to drinking was not enough to explain Brooks’s motive in attacking Sumner, but it provided a convenient way to understand its instigation.⁷³

Liquor is not often drunk alone, as temperance supporters knew, and Preston Brooks certainly would have wanted to talk over his plans while on the drink. Here, the role of Laurence Keitt in the cabal seems to be more evident. Keitt never testified before the Congressional investigating committee. The report variously indicates that he could not be found. As if this were not curious enough, Preston Brooks, in his statement prepared for the committee, very assiduously recused all others from involvement, including Edmundson and James Orr, but he had an especially careful line for Keitt. “Mr. Keitt came up when it [the assault] was about half over,” Brooks declared, noting, “Mr. Keitt went that morning [of the assault] to Baltimore.” In 1856, travel to and from Baltimore was technically possible within the same day, but, if Keitt left

⁷² “Mr. Gerrit Smith on the President’s Message: the Currency and the Hard Times,” *New York Tribune*, Dec. 21, 1857; Ralph Harlow, *Gerrit Smith: Philanthropist and Reformer* (New York: Henry Holt, 1939), 319-20; *New-York Daily Times*, January 29, 1857, p. 4.

⁷³ Elaine F. Parsons, *Manhood Lost: Fallen Men and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2003), 11; Harlow, *Gerrit Smith*, 349.

in the morning, he would have had to turn around almost immediately to be in the Senate by one o'clock. Perhaps Brooks misunderstood Keitt's travel plans, or perhaps he was attempting to cover for his fellow South Carolinian.⁷⁴

From what may be gleaned from letters with love interest Susan Sparks, Keitt was aware of the assault and approved of it. "He combined in happy proportions freedom of speech and freedom of the cudgel," he gushed in one letter. He was less content with the ensuing investigation and his resignation from the House. Unlike Brooks, whose resignation speech was concisely constructed, Keitt spoke at length, mostly in rebuttal to the charges made by Sumner about South Carolina's military record in the Revolutionary War. The record of his speech included carefully tabulated data on the number of soldiers served and battles fought in South Carolina, a half dozen tables in all. In the same speech, Keitt attacked not only Sumner but Anson Burlingame, who had challenged Brooks to a cleverly conceived duel. Keitt was judicious in revealing what he knew about Brooks's intentions, but one statement rings truer than the rest: "I know that my colleague intended to punish [Sumner]...Had I anticipated that act of justice there [in the Senate chamber], I should have been still nearer the scene of action than I was."⁷⁵

There is much truth in Keitt's words, one that resonates with Brooks' statement that Keitt entered the fray when the affair was "half over." While Keitt and Edmundson knew of Brooks' desire to chastise Sumner, they did not know exactly when or how Brooks would accomplish the task. Henry Edmundson influenced the manner of the assault, in suggesting the Senate chamber as the appropriate place to confront Sumner. Neither Edmundson nor Keitt, however, knew that Brooks would use his walking stick, a Gutta percha cane, weighing eleven and one-half ounces,

⁷⁴ "Statement by Preston S. Brooks," Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folder 4, SCL.

⁷⁵ Laurence M. Keitt to Susan Sparks, May 29, 1856, Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, DUL; "Speech of Hon. L. M. Keitt," July 16, 1856 in *Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 1st Sess., Appendix, 838.

three quarters of an inch in diameter, to assault Sumner. Keitt also carried a cane and possibly a pistol. According to several accounts, he brandished it over his head to prevent bystanders from interfering with the encounter.⁷⁶

What motivated Laurence Keitt and Henry Edmundson to help Brooks chastise Charles Sumner? For Keitt, the answer lay with the impetuosity of his character, the charismatic bluster that had carried him far in South Carolina politics. “The error of youth is rashness,” Keitt once wrote to his belle Susanna Sparks, “that of old age is timid caution.” At age thirty-one, the honor-obsessed Keitt was certainly youthful and rash enough to see Charles Sumner punished for his verbal assault on South Carolina. His presence mimicked the honorific capacity of Brooks’s second, as if the encounter were a duel. Ultimately, though, Keitt followed Brooks into the floor of the Senate, cane and perhaps pistol in hand, because he admired his fellow South Carolina College classmate and congressman. Four years his junior, Keitt looked up to Brooks. Their years in the House bonded them together as brothers, and they shared the same intimacies of political life that generations of representatives had known before them.⁷⁷

For Henry Edmundson, the analysis is harder still. Certainly, he was a states’ rights man and a slaveholder, but no single aspect of his character emerges in line with a desire to humiliate another congressman. In one recorded incident from the floor of the House, he motioned to draw his weapon, but he never did so (thanks, ironically enough, in large part to Keitt’s intervention). Edmundson was an enabler, someone who liked to put plans into motion without doing them for himself. As a congressman he followed this pattern, introducing very little legislation in twelve years in the House, but nevertheless strongly supporting Virginia’s claim to sovereignty

⁷⁶ Several eyewitnesses noted Keitt’s cane, see testimony of James W. Simonton, *Alleged Assault*, 58; on Keitt’s carrying a pistol, the source is an interview with a dubious Doctor Bunting in the *New York Herald*, May 23 and 30, 1856.

⁷⁷ Laurence M. Keitt to Susan Sparks, Jan. 20, 1855, Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, DUL.

throughout. Twice he coaxed Brooks into a wiser course of action, but in the end, he would not stand with his compatriot in his encounter with Sumner. Perhaps, in the end, Edmundson enjoyed watching mayhem unfold more than enacting it.

Prior to his caning of Charles Sumner, Preston Brooks had lived according to the strictest code of southern honor and stood ever wary of assaults to his character and manhood. The influence of his compatriots, the effects of alcohol, and the perceived crisis of the South's imperiled honor, Brooks acted, rashly but purposefully. He probably thought less about the insult to his distant kinsman Andrew P. Butler than about the public shame Sumner's speech had caused his state more generally. Brooks's motivations were a stew of forces, pressing unrelentingly on his psyche, which could only find release in the cathartic pummeling of a man he hardly knew. One minute and thirty blows of his Gutta percha cane later, Preston Brooks had literally made his mark on the representative of the North. What he could not know then was that he would never achieve a greater feat than Sumner's chastisement in the short time left to him.

The caning had lasted a minute, but its results were felt for many more to come. The southern reaction to the caning of Sumner was immediate and almost universally favorable to Brooks. From Edgefield came the enthusiastic endorsement of their favorite son: "some say [Sumner] received fifty stripes yet we very much doubt if the Captain cared to exceed the legal number of thirty-nine usually applied to scamps." In Columbia, dozens of ordinary citizens contributed funds to send Brooks an ornamental silver head to place atop a new cane. Brooks received dozens of new canes and an assortment of gifts from thankful countrymen. He also received numerous letters from family members, constituents, and admirers, some of whom offered critiques of actions but most of whom offered praise. One such letter commended the

action as the greatest of the young man's life: "We have just received the news of your flogging the Yankee Senator today, & I hesitate not an instant to say that no act of your life has ever secured to you half the applause." Brooks's cousins Thomas H. Means also approved of the attack, but he questioned the implementation: "I wish you had used a cowhide in place of a stick, & that you had provoked the scoundrel to have struck you first." Means's distinction was echoed by Brooks's brother, Ham, who also thought that Preston had chosen incorrectly: "I would not have made the slightest alteration, but one. I might have substituted the cow hide for the Gutta percha, but the difference is too small to complain." For those kinsmen close to Brooks, they could not help but comment on the irregular choice of weapon and manner in which the assault was carried out.⁷⁸

While many approved of Brooks's actions, the South Carolina congressman nevertheless could not prevent clashing with the more combative of constituents at home. In June 1856, Brooks traded heated words with George Tillman, older brother of "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman, though the affair did not amount to pistols being drawn. Tillman, who Edgefield historian George Chapman described as "very unpopular in the town" and possessing "many enemies," killed a man over a game of faro in 1856 and was by no means the peace-loving type. The resentment toward the "upper circle of Edgefield Village" was notable and reminiscent of Louis Wigfall's clash with Brooks. While Tillman and Brooks do not seem to have harbored lingering resentment, the incident shows that Brooks did not hesitate to confront others, even after the fallout of the caning of Sumner.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Edgefield *Advertiser*, May 28, 1856; Joel etc. to Preston S. Brooks, May 26, 1856, T.H. Means to Preston S. Brooks, May 28, 1856, and John S. Brooks to Preston S. Brooks, May 30, 1856, Preston Smith Brooks Papers, box 1, folders 3 and 5, SCL.

⁷⁹ Mathis, "Preston Smith Brooks," 299; Francis B. Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman, South Carolinian* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1944), 32.

Overnight, Brooks had become the living symbol of states rights and secession, a mantle he took up with much reluctance. During the months after the caning, Brooks attempted to avoid the numerous rallies and meetings held in his honor, but at a barbecue on October 3 in Old Ninety-Six, South Carolina, Brooks openly embraced the new platform that his actions had precipitated. “I have been a disunionist since the time I could think,” he rashly declared (in fact, only a year earlier, he had offered this toast in a letter to James L. Orr: “The Democratic Party: The best hope of the South, while in the present Union. Its principles will be cherished by the South, when the present Union is dissolved.”) Although Brooks had at best avowed moderate disunionist beliefs prior to 1856, the pressure to conform to the image bestowed upon him became too much to resist. Much as Brooks acted rashly in his decision to cane Sumner, he now spoke words about his political views that he did not mean. His life had spiraled beyond his control.⁸⁰

The attack on Sumner also brought an outpouring of outrage from the North, especially in Massachusetts where the response was one of righteous indignation. Newspapers, with few exceptions, lambasted Brooks, though not all of them defended Sumner. Several political cartoons appeared to commemorate the event. The most well-known of these cartoons was created by J.M. Magee, who titled his piece “Southern Chivalry—Arguments Versus Clubs.” The scene depicts a generic assailant striking Sumner, who holds a quill pen in his hand for defense, with an oversized club. Because Magee did not have a good likeness of Brooks—he was quite unknown to the public until the caning—the artist sketched the attacker with his back

⁸⁰ Charleston *Courier*, Oct. 7, 1856; see also Mathias, “Preston Smith Brooks,” 307. On the reactions of South Carolinians to caning of Charles Sumner, see the excellent unpublished seminar paper by John Roberson, “The Reactions of South Carolinians to the Brooks-Sumner Affair” (1982), SCL. Preston S. Brooks to Ozey R. Broyles, July 22, 1855, Orr and Patterson Family Papers, box 1, folder 2, SHC. On the political significance of barbecues in this period, see Daniel S. Dupre, “Barbecues and Pledges: Electioneering and the Rise of Democratic Politics in Antebellum Alabama,” *Journal of Southern History* 60, no. 3 (Aug. 1994): 479-512.

to the viewer. Magee's cartoon was distributed as a lithograph print, sold for 12 1/2 cents a copy. More widespread was the engraving that appeared in Frank Leslie's *Illustrated News* or Winslow Homer's only political cartoon, "Arguments of the Chivalry."⁸¹

In Washington, both halves of Congress debated the appropriate response to the caning. As never before, sectional feeling animated the debates and subsequent appointment of the congressional investigation committee about the affair. Laurence Keitt's thought that feeling in the city was "pretty much sectional" and "wild and fierce," and that if the northern congressmen had "stood up," Keitt predicted, "the city would now float with blood." Three Northerners, Lewis Campbell of Ohio (the same man who had nearly come to blows with Edmundson months earlier), Alexander Pennington of New Jersey, and Francis Spinner of New York, and two southerners, Howell Cobb of Georgia and Alfred Greenwood of Arkansas, formed the committee. Campbell likely took great pleasure in enacting revenge on his former antagonist, when on June 2, 1856, he recommended expulsion for Preston Brooks and censure for Henry A. Edmundson and Laurence M. Keitt. Cobb and Greenwood dissented, but the three-two vote was decided on strictly sectional terms.⁸²

The fallout from the caning of Sumner led to one last affair of honor for Preston Brooks. In a speech on June 21, the Massachusetts representative Anson Burlingame attacked both Brooks and Keitt on the floor of the House. As with Sumner's "Crime Against Kansas", the topic of Burlingame's attack centered on the historical legacy of the American Revolution,

⁸¹ For a thorough analysis of the political cartoons around the Brooks-Sumner affair, see David Tatham, "Pictorial Responses to the Caning of Senator Sumner" in *American Printmaking Before 1876: Fact, Fiction, and Fantasy* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1975), 11-19. On the northern reaction to the caning of Sumner, see Gienapp, "The Crime Against Sumner," 218-45; and Woods, "'The Indignation of Freedom-Loving People,'" 689-705;" and on the reaction in Washington, D.C., see Shelden, *Washington Brotherhood*, 120-143.

⁸² Laurence M. Keitt to Susan Sparks, May 29, 1856, Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, DUL. Robert L. Reid, *Howell Cobb: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1995): 859-61.

pitting the bravery of soldiers in Massachusetts versus those in South Carolina, and as with Sumner's speech and its assault on South Carolina, both Keitt and Brooks bristled at the insults. Here again, Keitt expressed a desire to challenge Burlingame, but Brooks again acted when Keitt merely blustered. When Burlingame informed Brooks that he would accept the duel only if it were on the side of Niagara Falls, the challenge was effectively evaded. Burlingame refused to compromise on this point, knowing full well that he had caught Brooks in a trap. The gambit worked: Brooks was made to look the fool and Burlingame the hero, even as the evidence suggests that Burlingame did not properly adhere to the code duello.⁸³

With the House investigation and criminal charges pending, Preston Brooks and Laurence Keitt faced uncertain futures. Brooks was given a nominal fine of three hundred dollars and no further punishment. On July 14, the House failed to muster the necessary two-thirds vote to expel Brooks, but he resigned immediately in protest. The next day, Henry Edmundson was exonerated of any wrongdoing, and Laurence Keitt was censured by resolution. Keitt did not take the censure well and offered a blistering resignation speech on the following day. As with his replies to his previous attackers, Keitt fashioned his speech in terms of history, specifically of the American Revolution. In his defense of Preston Brooks, moreover, Keitt turned to the language of manhood, arguing that Brooks had replied to Sumner "in a fair and manly way." He vowed never to inform on a friend, and he felt confident that his constituents

⁸³ On the Brooks-Burlingame affair, see James E. Campbell, "Sumner-Brooks-Burlingame, or, The Last of the Great Challenges," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 34 (1925): 435-73; and for Sumner's reaction to the proposed duel, see Charles Sumner to Joshua R. Giddings, July 22, 1856, *Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, ed. Palmer, 1:463. Senator Henry Wilson likewise avoided a duel through an immediate retraction of overly charged words.

would sustain him. Their constituents would hear nothing of the sort and subsequently reelected them without opposition to Congress.⁸⁴

While their constituents and by extension most Southerners roundly approved of Brooks's conduct, two of the keenest observers of the Southern political position expressed absolute disdain for Brooks, Butler, Keitt, and the other South Carolinians who had precipitated unnecessary conflict with the North. Long a political watchdog from his estate at Redcliffe, James Henry Hammond was quick to judge both Brooks and Butler. Hammond had never thought very highly of the erstwhile Captain from Edgefield, and upon the latter's unexpected death in January 1857, he bashed Brooks to his confidant William Gilmore Simms. "The decadence to you and I was clear," he surmised to Simms, adding, "he is removed at the happy moment." Of course, Hammond harbored no pleasant memories for the Congress, nor would he suffer taking Brooks's vacant chair. "I left it in disgust at 28 years of age," he sneered to the newly elected Milledge L. Bonham in March 1857, and "would about as soon have my throat cut as go back to it at 50."⁸⁵

Much like Hammond, Simms was critical of Andrew Pickens Butler from the moment of his ascendancy to the Senate. "Butler & myself dined together at Gov. Johnson's," the author noted in 1847, adding caustically, "The Senator scarcely gains ground in his new career." Simms continued to think poorly of Butler and Laurence Keitt. In late August 1856, he lamented to the congressmen and fellow Cooperationist James L. Orr: "What between Butler's and Keitt's interest in cudgellings and courtships, I have not received a single document from either of them this session." In September, Butler complained to Simms about attacks from northern

⁸⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 34th Congress, 1st Session, 1628, 1641, Appendix, 838; Merchant, "Laurence M. Keitt," 117-25.

⁸⁵ James H. Hammond to William G. Simms, January 31, 1857, quoted in Carol Bleser, ed., *The Hammonds of Redcliffe* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981), 24; James H. Hammond to Milledge L. Bonham, Mar. 10, 1857, Milledge Luke Bonham Papers, box 1, folder 42, SCL.

newspapers, asking the writer to answer them on the senator's behalf. Incredulous, Simms snorted to Hammond: "It is a pretty thing that one who has fed all his life at the treasury bowls, who is still feeding,--who is chosen for this very sort of warfare—should call upon me to do his business, whom he & his fraternity have always contrived to keep without feed at all."⁸⁶

While the northern press soiled the reputation of Brooks, Laurence Keitt was not immune to attack either. The *New-York Daily Times* reported that Keitt beat his washerwoman at his living quarters. Another newspaper reported on a supposed eyewitness who saw Keitt "holding a pistol behind him partially under the flap of his coat," a detail that was included by the political cartoonist in a later rendering of the caning. During the House debate about the caning, Keitt was "rampant" and nearly attacked Pennsylvania representative James Hickman, over the impression that the House report was being printed as cheap Republican Party propaganda. Alabama representative Sampson Harris grabbed Keitt's coattails as he stalked down the aisle toward Hickman, effectively preventing further violence. Keitt did not forget the insult given by Hickman, and neither did Henry Edmundson.⁸⁷

Keitt soon became embroiled in another physical encounter with a fellow congressman. In February 1858, while Congress was preoccupied with the legitimacy of the constitution sent from Kansas, Laurence Keitt and Galusha Grow nearly came to blows on the floor of the House. Oliver Wendell Holmes purportedly penned a poem for *Punch* to commemorate the occasion. In "The Fight Over the Body of Keitt," the author lampooned the "ontameable [sic] dander of Keitt" and cheered Grow, "hitting straight from the shoulder." Keitt's famous remark, that of calling Grow a "black Republican puppy" would have been cause for a duel in other

⁸⁶ William G. Simms to James H. Hammond, November 30, 1847, in *Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, 6 vols., ed. Mary C. Simms Oliphant (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1952-1982), 2:379; Simms to James L. Orr, Aug. 30, 1856, *ibid.*, 3:442; Simms to Hammond, Sept. 7, 1856, *ibid.*, 3:446.

⁸⁷ *New-York Daily Times*, May 28, 1856; *New York Herald*, May 30, 1856; *Congressional Globe*, 34th Congress, Session 1, Appendix, 805-09; *New-York Daily Times*, July 10, 1856.

circumstances, but the weary Northerner replied with the insult “nigger-driver.” The two men were at each other’s throats, along with perhaps twenty-five other Congressmen (Keitt later dismissed a report of his “being struck [as] a foul lie”). The affair ended only when Mississippi representative William Barksdale was un-wigged and brought the combatants to a standstill with laughter. As the future Confederate munitions officer Josiah Gorgas later recorded of the winter of 1858, “There seems to be an angry cloud hanging over Washington.” The agriculturist and fire-eater Edmund Ruffin agreed: though he found the brawl disgraceful, “it seems to be as probably a manner of the beginning of a separation of the states as any other.”⁸⁸

Despite the impending cloud, Washingtonians continued to conduct business as usual, even through the winter of 1860. On December 20, 1860, Washington society attended the much anticipated wedding of John Edward Bouligny of Louisiana, the American Party holdover and later stout Unionist, to Mary Elizabeth Parker, daughter of a wealthy Washington family and later an author of some repute. At the reception held at the Parker family’s Washington home, a sudden commotion was heard. “Madam, do you suppose the house is on fire?” President Buchanan asked Sara Agnes Rice Pryor, who then investigated the cause of the noise. As Pryor later remembered: “[T]here in the entrance hall I found Mr. Lawrence Keitt, member from South Carolina, leaping in the air, shaking a paper over his head, and exclaiming, ‘Thank God! Oh, thank God!’” Started by Keitt’s behavior, Pryor asked, “Mr. Keitt, are you crazy? The President hears you, and wants to know what’s the matter.” To this Keitt replied, “South Carolina has

⁸⁸ See especially Poore, *Perley’s Reminiscences*, 1:532-37; *Charleston Mercury*, Feb. 8, 11, 13, 1858; *Charleston Courier*, Feb. 16, 1858; “The Fight Over the Body of Keitt,” *Punch* 24 (Mar., 1858), 100; Henry Watterson, “Introduction” in *Twenty Years in the Press Gallery*, ed. Orlando O. Stealey (New York: privately printed, 1906), vii-ix; Merchant, “Laurence M. Keitt,” 173; Nichols, *Disruption of American Democracy*, 158-160; Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union*, 3:287-88; Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 2:139-40; Laurence M. Keitt to Ellison Keitt, Feb. 17, 1858, in the “Collection of Autographs of Confederate States of America,” Charles Colcock Jones Jr. Papers, DUL; Josiah Gorgas Diary, Feb. 26, 1858, in *The Journals of Josiah Gorgas, 1857-1878*, ed. Sarah W. Wiggins (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1995), 16; “Feb. 9, [1858],” in *Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, ed. Scarborough, 1:155.

seceded! Here's the telegram. I feel like a boy let out from school." Laurence Massillon Keitt, for all his poetic, philosophic, and historical pondering, did very little to belie this notion or to prevent the storm clouds from worsening. If anything, he, and Preston Brooks before him, did as much as anyone to bring forth the coming maelstrom.⁸⁹

Edmundson's role, while little noticed at that time, nevertheless incited the wrath of Horace Greeley and the New York *Tribune*. "It is plain from what Edmundson states," Greeley fumed, "that he does not state all that passed between him and Brooks." Edmundson was, in the newspaper's estimation, "the author of the scheme," "a fellow conspirator," and one of two "confederates in cowardice and crime." Greeley's assessment, based as it was solely on the testimony given by Edmundson and later printed in the *Globe*, still carries with it some convincing argument; however, colored as it was by northern prejudice and a lack of additional facts, it is an interpretation somewhat shallow in its conception. Was Edmundson the author of the scheme? No. A fellow conspirator? Yes. Henry Edmundson carefully interwove himself into the life of Preston Brooks, as a social intimate, a fellow states right Democrat, and, finally, as a co-conspirator in the plan to assault Charles Sumner. He was, however, not the author, or even the instigator, of the crime. He was, at best, a clever corrective to a sleep-deprived, and possibly alcohol ridden, Preston Brooks.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Sara Agnes Rice Pryor, *Reminiscences of Peace and War* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1905), 111. Mary Elizabeth Parker Bouilgny authored two books, *Bubbles and Ballast: Life in Paris during the Brilliant Days of Empire* (Baltimore: Kelly, Piet, & co., 1871) and *A Tribute to W. W. Corcoran of Washington City* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1874). The library copy held by the University of Michigan has the inscription to "Doct. A. Y. P. Garnett," dated May 1, 1874. Alexander Yelverton Payton Garnett was the son of Muscoe Russell Hunter and Maria Wills Battle Garnett, kinsmen of the Garnetts of Essex County, Virginia. On Dr. Garnett, see "A.Y.P. Garnett, M.D.," *Cincinnati Medical News* 21, no. 249 (Sept. 1888): 613-18; and John B. Nichols, ed., *History of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia, 1817-1909* (Washington, D.C.: Medical Society, 1909), 244. On contemporary depictions of Keitt on the eve of secession, see also *Vanity Fair* 1, no. 1 (Dec. 31, 1859), 7, and *Harper's Weekly* (Dec. 22, 1860), 22.

⁹⁰ New York *Tribune*, June 6, 1856.

In his remaining years in Congress, Henry Edmundson continued to issue threats against other congressmen, though without much effect. In February 1860, he tangled with John Hickman, the same Pennsylvania representative with whom Keitt had nearly come to blows four years earlier. The quarrel centered on decorum and the required respect of Vice-President John C. Breckinridge, who was also Edmundson's former messmate. One newspaper correspondent reported: "Disengaging himself from his associate, Mr. Edmundson went forward, passed Mr. Hickman, turned, and facing him, gave expression to some heated remarks touching the courage of the North." Edmundson, who was likely drunk, attempted to strike Hickman with "a twig he picked up for the purpose" (another account reported the object to be Edmundson's cane). Breckinridge, Keitt, and Thomas L. Clingman of North Carolina promptly intervened and prevented further escalation, though Edmundson and Breckinridge may have joked about the affair for days afterward (Keitt and Breckinridge enjoyed cordial relations as well). Edmundson's drunk twigging of Hickman stands as a fitting corollary to his previous involvement in the encounter with Sumner, though it would appear that Edmundson's twig was not nearly as effective as Brook's Gutta percha cane.⁹¹

* * * * *

Although the cabal of Brooks, Keitt, and Edmundson had come to an end, a new trio, featuring two of the three confederates, constituted itself far away from Washington. On Sunday, September 7, 1856, Laurence Massillon Keitt checked in to the fashionable Yellow Sulphur Springs resort near Blacksburg in Montgomery County, Virginia. His arrival was preceded a day earlier by Henry Alonzo Edmundson, whose brother James Preston Edmundson

⁹¹ See the varying accounts from the *Philadelphia Press*, *New York Evening Post*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* reprinted in "The Assault Upon Mr. Hickman," *New-York Daily Tribune*, Feb. 14, 1860. On Keitt's relationship to Breckinridge, see Susan Sparks Keitt to "Carrie," Feb. 11, 1860, Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, DUL.

had developed the Yellow Sulphur Springs Turnpike which connected to the Christiana train station and had been a co-owner of the resort since 1853. Then, on Tuesday, another notable southern partisan arrived: Edmund Ruffin of Virginia. Perhaps Edmundson had invited Keitt and Ruffin to take the waters and to celebrate the success of the previous session, which had ended on August 30. Perhaps, too, Edmundson had invited Preston Brooks to join him at the springs, but the demands of his South Carolina constituents prevented his presence. Undoubtedly, the caning of Sumner three months earlier was a topic of discussion, as was the upcoming presidential election. If the Black Republican Frémont defeated the Democrat Buchanan, the trio likely agreed from the comfort of their mineral bath, disunion alone would follow.⁹²

The healing properties of the springs might have done Brooks some good, for he soon contracted a nasty case of diphtheria and suffered violently from the croup. On January 29, 1857, Laurence Keitt announced to the House of Representatives that Preston Brooks had died in his residence in Washington on Tuesday evening, January 27, at seven o'clock. Brooks, who had been staying at Brown's Hotel, probably until such time as he could find more suitable quarters with Keitt and others from his state (one of Brooks's last efforts while living had been to

⁹² For the best account of the Yellow Sulphur Springs resort, see John G. Worsham, Jr., "'A Place so Lofty and Secluded': Yellow Sulphur Springs in Montgomery County," *Virginia Cavalcade* 27, no. 1 (Summer 1977): 30-41; however, Worsham incorrectly cites "John B. Edmundson" as the co-owner of the springs; see Armistead W. Forrest to Thomas H. Foulkes, Charles B. Gardner, and James P. Edmundson, and Deed, May 21, 1853; *Deed Book P, 1850-1855*, in *Land Records of Montgomery County* (microfilm, 109 reels, Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1953), reel 8/262; and "Chap. 297.--An Act to incorporate the Yellow Springs turnpike company," *Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia, Passed in 1852-53, in the Seventy-Seventh Year of the Commonwealth* (Richmond, Va.: William F. Ritchie, 1853), 208; and the various records, including a list of shareholders and the signature of "James P. Edmundson, President," in the Yellow Springs Turnpike Company Records, 1853-1854, Virginia Board of Public Works inventory entry no. 436, LV. Edmund Ruffin regularly took in the waters at the White Sulphur Springs; see Scarborough, ed., *Diary of Edmund Ruffin*, 1:228-29, 330-34, 337-40, 448-53. On the prevalence of elite Virginians visits to various mineral springs, see also Charlene M. Boyer Lewis, *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs, 1790-1860* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2001); and Thomas A. Chambers, *Drinking the Waters: Creating an American Leisure Class at Nineteenth-Century Mineral Springs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), esp. 176-78, 180-81.

challenge a Know Nothing representative, Henry William Hoffman of Maryland, to a duel) now belonged to the ages. Keitt's eulogy in the House lamented his fallen comrade and spoke indirectly about his crowning achievement the prior spring. As was the custom of the Congress, both chambers adjourned in honor of the fallen congressman. Brooks's body, incidentally, was transported months later to Edgefield, where he found a final resting place at the Trinity Episcopal Church that his father had helped to establish. His aged mother was among the crowd to see her son buried.⁹³

In retrospect, once the jubilation of Brooks's caning of Sumner had faded, leaders began to reconsider the attack. The aptly named Mississippi politician Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar, who would later famously eulogize Sumner on the floor of the House in 1874, had already begun to reconsider the meaning of the attack in 1861. Mary B. Chesnut observed in her diary that Lamar lamented that Sumner had not "stood on his manhood and training and struck back when Preston Brooks assailed him." Had Sumner done so, Lamar reasoned, "Preston Brooks's blow need not have been the opening skirmish of the war." The Mississippian concluded on a note of regret: "What an awful blunder that Preston Brooks's business was!" Looking back from the perch of hindsight, moderates like Hammond, Simms, and Lamar could damn Preston Brooks as a blundering hothead who brought about the Civil War. The interpretation conveniently ignored Laurence Keitt and Henry Edmundson, who might have been equally criticized for their conspiratorial roles in the caning. That history only remembers Brooks may be a convention of the naming of the event (the Brooks-Sumner Affair), but to think of the encounter between Brooks and Sumner as an affair of honor entirely misinterprets what such affairs actually meant to antebellum Southerners. To rethink the Brooks-Sumner Affair as

⁹³ Maximilian LaBorde, "Art. V.--Hon. Preston S. Brooks.: Speeches of the Hon. Preston S. Brooks, and Proceedings of Congress on the Occasion of his Death," *Southern Quarterly Review* (1842-1857), (Feb. 1857), 365; *Edgefield Advertiser*, Dec. 4, 1856.

the Brooks-Keitt-Edmundson Cabal more accurately depicts how three Southerners, enraged by what they perceived to be the insults given by a pompous exemplar of northern manhood, struck back and scored a blow for the South. It would be at best a pyrrhic victory, at worst the beginning of the end for the world that the members of cabal so dearly valued.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Diary entry from June 29, 1861, in *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. Woodward, 86.

CONCLUSION:

MALE INTIMACY IN AMERICAN POLITICS

“The actual soldier of 1862-’65, North and South, with...his fierce friendship...I say, will never be written -- perhaps must not and should not be.”

--Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days*, 1882-83

The Civil War shattered so much about the old political order, shifting the contest for supremacy of the nation from the intimate world of the Washington boardinghouse to the gruesome sites of a thousand battlefields across the country. The great American poet Walt Whitman had felt firsthand the terrible horrors of war and wrote about them with tortured devotion in the years ahead. In his reply to “an insisting friend” in 1882, the aging bard obliged his correspondent with pages of biographical and genealogical information, including a meditation on the meaning of the war filtered through his experience as a hospital nurse. The history of “the actual soldiers of 1862-’65, North and South, with...his fierce friendship...I say, will never be written -- perhaps must not and should not be.” This famous observation from *Specimen Days* suggests an inherent unknowability of “fierce friendship,” not just those of soldiers, but of all the intimate friendships that had once existed in the decades before the war.¹

The Civil War created a “new masculinist ethos,” which carried with it significant changes to numerous areas of American culture and politics alike in the years ahead. In the case of the author Mark Twain and three of his closest friends, the findings of one scholar that they were “affected by, or aware of, a more fluid sense of gender roles,” one that “harked back to an earlier period and extended further along the homosocial continuum than would have been common by the century’s end,” reveals how the practices of males friendship were changing in

¹ Walt Whitman, *The Complete Prose Work of Walt Whitman*, 7 vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1902), 1:3, 141.

the postwar years. Likewise, the Democratic politician Grover Cleveland—the only other bachelor elected to the presidency besides James Buchanan (and coincidentally, the first Democrat to reach the highest office since Buchanan)—was a prime example of the boisterous, alcoholic, masculine culture that had predominated at mid-century. In his rise to power, Cleveland had not required the presence of a wife to achieve political success. Once installed in the White House, however, the forty-nine-year-old Cleveland soon married, wedding the twenty-one-year-old Frances Clara Folsom in 1886. Historians have attributed the move to a shrewd calculus on Cleveland's part to promote his reelection in 1888. Since Grover Cleveland, no man or woman has obtained the presidency who has also been unmarried, a suggestion that the influence of intimate male friendship in the Gilded Age had diminished considerably since the Jacksonian era.²

By the time that Walt Whitman published his final edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1892, something else had changed in how society viewed male intimacy. New scientific terms, laden in the language of sexology, were being invented and called into question intimate relationships of all kinds. With the introduction of the “homosexual” as a discursively constructed category, the intimacies of male friendship and romantic attachment suddenly carried the potential for deviancy. Such possibilities had always been present, but now society began to concern itself ever more with its classification, regulation, and repression. As discourses about homosexuality became more prevalent, the gendered terms of political gossip also began to change. In

² Although focused on literature, the analysis offered by John Stauffer, “Embattled Manhood and New England Writers, 1860-1870,” in *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006): 120-139, here 133, is applicable more generally. On Twain, see Peter Messent, *Mark Twain and Male Friendship: The Twichell, Howells, and Rogers Friendships* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), here 22. A perception analysis on Grover Cleveland is offered by Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), esp. 59-74.

particular, political insults to manhood were becoming increasingly sexualized in their construction. Whereas once Andrew Jackson had called William Rufus King by the relatively tame epithet “Aunt Nancy,” by the end of the century, the phrase “mollycoddle” was commonly applied to political enemies perceived to be effeminate (for example, the “Mugwumps,” who bolted from the Republican Party, suffered this insult at the hands of the popular press). While both “Aunt Nancy” and “mollycoddle” carried the implication of effeminacy, only after the classification of homosexuality as deviant could the hidden meanings be made more overt.³

The changing views of sexuality corresponded with newly emerging conceptions of manhood and manly comportment. In the decades following the Civil War, the nation moved away from the “soldierly manhood” of the war years and instead embraced with gusto a budding male physical culture. Sports and pastimes such as prizefighting, college football, baseball, and cycling all became popular, while an emphasis on bodybuilding promoted the widespread growth of gymnasiums. Nevertheless, representatives of the counterculture sporadically appeared and challenged the hegemonic masculine culture. When Oscar Wilde toured America in 1882, for example, his flamboyant bravura took the nation by storm. But Wilde troubled many. Several newspapers’ response to his “styled effeminacy,” as one scholar has suggested, “signaled an underlying concern about American manhood itself.” Conceptions of gender and sexuality, and

³ On the invention and subsequent introduction of the category of homosexuality in America, see Jonathan N. Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York: Plume, 1995); and Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999). This same era brought about the beginnings of an identifiable gay culture in such urban settings as New York, Boston, and San Francisco; see George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic, 1994); and Nan A. Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003); and on the regulation of erotic publication, see Donna Dennis, *Licentious Gotham: Erotic Publishing and Its Prosecution in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2009). For the changes of manhood in American politics, see Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2000); and Kevin P. Murphy, *Political Manhood: Red Bloods, Mollycoddles, & the Politics of Progressive Era Reform* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2008), esp. 1-9, 54-55, 211fn2.

their associated intersections with race and class more broadly, were rapidly changing. By 1890, a historian of manliness in the period has argued, “a number of social, economic, and cultural changes were converging to make the ongoing gender process especially active for the American middle class.” The remaining decades of the century witnessed a concerted effort to remove traces of effeminacy from the prevailing ideas of white, middle-class manhood.⁴

The loudest representative of this new manliness was Theodore Roosevelt, who used the bully pulpit of his office to pronounce indictments against effeminacies of a more political kind. In a lecture given to Harvard undergraduates in February 1907, Roosevelt declared: “In a republic like ours the governing class is composed of the strong men who take the trouble to do the work of government; and if you are too timid or too fastidious or too careless to do your part in this work, then you forfeit your right to be considered one of the governing and you become one of the governed in stead one of the driven cattle of the political arena.” Theodore Roosevelt was a peculiar figurehead of the “strenuous manhood” that he now urged upon the young Harvard students to follow, for he had been a sickly youth, always underweight, and an asthmatic. His later life embrace of physical culture that had become all the rage by century’s end suggests the continuing importance of manhood in American politics.⁵

⁴ On Wilde, see Mary W. Blanchard, *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1998), here xiv, 3. On manhood in this period, see the perceptive studies by Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), here 11.

⁵ Theodore Roosevelt, “At the Harvard Union,” Feb. 23, 1907, available at <<http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/trspeechescomplete.html>>. The culture of manhood at Harvard was changing, with more widespread persecution of homosexuals in the years ahead; see Kim Townsend, *Manhood at Harvard: William James and Others* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998); Douglass Shand-Tucci, *The Crimson Letter: Harvard, Homosexuality, and the Shaping of American Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003); and esp., William Wright, *Harvard's Secret Court: The Savage 1920 Purge of Campus Homosexuals* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005). On the ideas of manhood espoused by Roosevelt more generally, see Arnaldo Testi, “The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity,” *Journal of American History* 81, no. 4 (Mar. 1995): 1509-33. An unexpected intersection of Roosevelt to this study is that Cornelia Roosevelt, the very woman who had once mediated the intimate friendship of James Buchanan and William Rufus King, was his paternal grandaunt.

Even as male friendships had mostly moved away from the intense intimacy of the earlier part of the century, it is interesting to note that intimate friendships among political women continued well into the Twentieth Century. Women's historians have been more attentive to revealing the contours of these relationships, with recent accounts ranging from the often temporary, same-sex relationships of women in the Victorian South through those of leading figures of the century, most notably Eleanor Roosevelt. In the case of this famous First Lady, the popular response has been remarkable. Critics attacked the biographer Blanche W. Cook for her book that allegedly outed Roosevelt as having participated in a lesbian relationship with the journalist Lorena Hickok. But as the author responded in a piece in *The Nation*, "Where I wrote of love and passionate friendships, and chose my words with care, they talk about 'sexual partners.'" Cook took a feminist approach to her subject, which permitted her to read the letters of Roosevelt and Hickok and discover an intimate and homoerotic, if not homosexual, relationship between them. In the terms of the twentieth-century (homo)-erotics, such a reading seems more plausible than one conducted on the letters of those who lived by the different potentialities of the Nineteenth Century.⁶

More than a century has passed since Theodore Roosevelt's vision of a fighting American manhood, and with it a revolution in understanding of gender, sexuality, and friendship. More curiously still, we are today in something of a renaissance of intimate male friendship. New words for male intimacy seem to enter the lexicon with insistence. We live in an era of an ever-growing cadre of college fraternities, of an intense physical culture populated

⁶ A recent account of same-sex relationships among southern women, see Anya Jabour, "Female Families: Same-Sex Love in the Victorian South," in *Family Values in the Old South*, ed. Craig T. Friend and Jabour (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2010): 86-108. For the biography in question of Eleanor Roosevelt, see Blanche W. Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, 2 vols. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993); and the subsequent reflection by Cook, "Eleanor—Loves Of a First a Lady," *The Nation* (July 5, 1993): 24-25. For a problematic reading of the letters of an equally famous figure from the Nineteenth Century, see C.A. Tripp, *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005).

by men who seek to find connections to their Paleolithic ancestry, and, perhaps most poignantly, of the “bromance,” where the intimate friendships of the antebellum period seem to resurface in an avowedly de-eroticized post-modern configuration. But if the “bromance” of today can be seen as reiteration of the friendships of the American past, might we have more in common with men such as James Buchanan and William Rufus King than we previously thought? Indeed, the essayist William Deresiewicz seems to think so, maintaining that the “bromance” suggests that “[a]t best, intense friendships are something we’re expected to grow out of.” The idea that a variety of antebellum political leaders never “grew out” of their intimate friendship presents an interesting subversion to the disappointing dichotomies of today’s gendered landscapes, ruled as it is by “bromance” and other insidious neologisms. Since a return to the romantic friendships of an earlier era seems unlikely, we might instead wonder if the intertwining of intimacy and power is still a fundamental part of today’s American political landscape.⁷

Several congressmen have thought so and quite recently, too. During the 2000s, six congressmen affiliated with a non-denominational Christian “Fellowship”—Tom Coburn, Zach Wamp, Heath Shuler, Bart Stupak, Mike Doyle, and John Ensign—decided to live together at a nineteenth-century row house on C Street in Washington, D.C. They were a mixture of senators (Ensign and Coburn) and representatives, of Republicans and Democrats (Stupak and Doyle), from as far as Nevada and as close as Pennsylvania. To a one they were married, yet each man decided to reside in the capital without his wife or family. Like many who travel for work, they faced the uncertainties of being away from their loved ones at home. To combat the loneliness of separation and to live in accordance with their religious views, the men of the Fellowship naturally drifted together. The six men spoke of “deeply personal” subjects and considered

⁷ On the future of male friendship, see William Deresiewicz, “Faux Friendship,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Dec. 6, 2009; and on the problematic deployment of the term “bromance,” see Dainty Smith, “The ‘Bromance’ Problem,” *Gender, Popular Culture and Media Freedom* 10 (2012), 16-18.

themselves the most intimate of friends, which made the unanticipated revelation that the Nevada senator John Ensign was having an affair with the wife of an aide on Oklahoma Senator Tom Coburn's staff that much more troubling. Ensign would ultimately resign over the affair in 2011, leaving the fate of the house on C Street in question.⁸

The Congressional Fellowship of the 2000s suggests the continued valence of both domesticity and manhood to politics. The New Jersey politician and bachelor Corey Booker offers one further example in this context. In an interview during the 2013 U.S. Senate campaign, Booker said that he did not mind being called gay, because it permitted him a chance to challenge existing stereotypes and to say: “So what does it matter if I am? So be it. I hope you are not voting for me because you are making the presumption that I’m straight.” His Republican challenger, Steve Lonegan, bristled at Booker’s apparent comfort over being called gay: “It’s kind of weird. As a guy, I personally like being a guy.” The exchange between Booker and Lonegan suggests that the gendered performance of manhood, marital status, and the sexual orientation of political men still matters today; in fact, it may matter more so than it did two hundred years. Even as the kinds of challenges posed between politicians have changed, manhood’s essential role in defining the terms of political discourse and much of political culture has not. While attacks are no longer made with canes on the floor of the Senate, the meanings of manhood remain as ever intimately contested as they did during the antebellum period.⁹

⁸ Peter J. Boyer, “Frat House for Jesus: The Entity Behind C Street,” *The New Yorker*, Sept. 13, 2010. Another group of congressional roommates—Senator Chuck Schumer, Senator Dick Durbin, and Representative George Miller (three Democrats from New York, Illinois, and California, respectively)—inspired the premise for the show *Alpha House*, released by Amazon Studios in 2013.

⁹ The original interview with Booker was published in Jason Horowitz, “New Jersey’s Cory Booker: A Perfect Senator for ‘This Town’?”, *Washington Post*, Aug. 26, 2013; the response from Lonegan was published in Bill Hoffmann, “Senate Hopeful Lonegan Launches Attack on Cory Booker,” *Newsmax*, Aug. 27, 2013, available at <<http://www.newsmax.com/NewsmaxVideos/new-jersey-lonegan-booker/2013/08/27/id/522557>>.

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Park Family Papers (MS 384)
Alfred White Van Sinderen Collection (MS 1095)
James Watson Webb Papers (MS 683)

Delaware

Hagley Museum and Library, Manuscript and Archives Department
Wright Family Papers (Acc. 1665)

Georgia

University of Georgia, Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library
Howell Cobb Family Papers, 1793-1932 (MS 1376)

Indiana

Franklin College Archives
David Demaree Banta Collection

Maine

Bowdoin College, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives
Fessenden Collection, 1786-1982, n.d. (M59)
Franklin Pierce Correspondence, 1828-1869, n.d. (M148.1)

Maine Historical Society, Portland
George Washington Pierce Papers (Coll. 396)
Francis O. J. Smith Papers (Coll. 38)

Maryland

Johns Hopkins University, Alan M. Chesney Medical Archives
Harriet Lane Home for Invalid Children Papers

Massachusetts

Boston Athenæum
Autograph collection, 1679-1923 (Mss.L586)

Boston Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscript Department
Thomas Gold Appleton Letters

Houghton Library, Harvard University
Charles Sumner Papers (MS Am 1)
Charles Sumner letters to George Washington Greene (bMS Am 1107)
Howe Family Papers, 1819-1910 (MS Am 2119)
Henry W. Longfellow letters to various correspondents, 1830-1883 (MS Am 1127)
Letters to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (MS Am 1340.2-1340.7)
Palfrey Family Papers, 1713-1915 (bMS Am 1704-1704.21)

Lenox Library Association
Judge Julius Rockwell Collection

Massachusetts Historical Society
Adams Family Papers, 1639-1889 (P-54)
Appleton Family Papers, 1539-1941 (Ms. N-1778)
Annie Adams Fields Papers, 1847-1912 (Ms. N-1221)
Charles Pinckney Sumner Papers, 1779-1839 (Ms. N-1641)
Winthrop Family Papers, 1537-1990 (P-350)

Michigan

University of Michigan, William L. Clements Library
Appleton-Aiken Family Papers, 1812-1900
U.S. President Papers, 1776-1945 (James Buchanan letters)

Missouri

State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia
David Rice Atchison Papers, 1837-1953 (C71)

Missouri History Museum, Library, and Research Center, St. Louis
John Compton Brickey Papers, 1816-1973
Judge Samuel Treat Papers, 1815-1889 (A1647)

New Hampshire

Dartmouth College, Rauner Special Collections Library
Hale-Chandler Papers, 1777-1873
Franklin Pierce Letters, 1836-1869

New Hampshire Historical Society
Jeremiah Blodgett Papers [1994 – 085 (M)]
Edmund Burke Papers [M 1963 – 024]
Asa Fowler Papers [1981 – 68 (M)]
Benjamin French & Henry F. French Papers [M 1966 – 011]
John Parker Hale Papers [M 1926 – 006]
John Hatch George Papers [M 1926 – 003]
Benjamin Pierce Papers [M 1982 – 071]
Franklin Pierce Papers [M 1929 – 001]
Amos Tuck Papers [M 1964 – 011]

New Jersey

New Jersey Historical Society
Boggs Family Papers, 1737-1942 (MG 27)
Mahlon Dickerson and Philemon Dickerson Papers, 1774-1922 (MG 13)
Walter N. Eastburn Manuscript Collection, 1743-1956 (MG 294)
Miscellaneous Manuscripts, 1664-1956 (MG 25)
Statesmen Autograph Collection, 1680-1993 (MG 31)
Stevens Family (Hoboken, NJ), 1663-1959 (MG 409)
Jacob Stern Thomson Papers, 1765-1844 (MG 247)
Peter Dumont Vroom Papers, 1820-1893 (MG 20)
Garret D. Wall Papers, 1809-1841 (MG 271)

Princeton University, Rare Books and Special Collections Department
Blair and Lee Family Papers (C0614)

New York

Brooklyn Historical Society
James Buchanan letters

Columbia University, Rare Book and Manuscript Library
Belmont Family Papers 1799-1930 (MS 1412)
Hamilton Fish Letters, 1827-1893 (MS 0424)

Cornell University, Rare and Manuscript Collection
James Buchanan Receipt and Letter, 1808, 1847 (#4600)
Andrew Dickson White Papers, 1832-1919 (#01-02-02)

Gilder Lehrman Collection
James Buchanan Letters
Franklin Pierce Letters

New-York Historical Society
James Buchanan Papers (AHMC – Buchanan, James)
Lewis P. Clover Papers (Misc. Mss. Clover)
Stephen H. Parker Letters (AHMC – Parker, Stephen H.)
Franklin Pierce Letters (AHMC – Pierce, Franklin)
Edward Neufville Tailer Diaries, 1848-1917 (BV Tailer)
Thurlow Weed Papers, 1818-1882 (Misc. Mss. Weed)

New York Public Library, Berg Collection of English and American Literature
Nathaniel Hawthorne Collection of Papers, 1694-1931 (MSS Hawthorne, N)
Sophia Peabody Hawthorne Collection of Papers, 1775-1944 (MSS Hawthorne, S)

New York Public Library, Manuscript and Archives Division
George Bancroft Papers, 1823-1890 (MssCol 196)
James Buchanan Letters and Documents, 1824-1864, n.d. (MssColl 17763)
Clymer-Meredith-Read Family Papers, 1675-1902 (MssCol 577)
James A. Hamilton Papers, ca. 1740-1870 (MssCol 1299)
Edward S. and Mary Stillman Harkness Manuscript Collection, ca. 1400-1945 (MssCol 1318)
Horace Greely Papers, 1831-1873 (MssCol 1231)
George William Gordon Papers, 1825-1852 (MssCol 1177)
Washington Irving Papers, 1759-1898 (MssColl 1524)
T.H. Morrell Collection of Original Autograph Letters of the Presidents of the United States (MssCol 2061)
Theodorus Bailey Myers Collection, 1542-1876 (MssCol 2091)

Franklin Pierce Letters and Documents, 1843-1893 (Mss Coll 17911)
Albert Tracy Papers, 1843-1893 (MssColl 3020)
Fernando Wood Letters and Documents, 1839-1871 (MssCol 4686)

New York Society Library
James Buchanan Letters

Pierpont Morgan Library
American Literary and Historical Manuscripts, various
Nathaniel Hawthorne Manuscripts (Misc. American Hawthorne)
Henry Wheaton Family Collection, 1827-1861 (Misc. American Wheaton)

Wells College, Archives and Special Collections
Edwin Barber Morgan Papers, 1836-1904

North Carolina

Duke University, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library
George Booker Papers, 1850-1862
Bedford Brown Papers, 1830-1906
James Buchanan letters and documents (various)
Campbell Family Papers, 1731-1969
Clement Claiborne Clay Papers, 1811-1925
Lawrence Massillon Keitt Papers, 1855-1864
Charles Colcock Jones Jr. Papers, 1763-1926
Joseph Long Papers, 1820-1902
Edward Lucas Papers, 1821-1868
Willie Person Mangum Papers, 1763-1861
Franklin Pierce letters and documents (various)
Henry Alexander Wise Papers, 1833-1894

Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina
Franklin Harper Elmore Papers, 1833-1926 (#814)
Gignilliat Family Papers, 1831-1867; 1910 (#1270)
James Henry Hammond Letters, 1831-1845 (#305-z)
Kenan Family Papers, 1748-1996 (#4225)
William Rufus King Letters, 1825; 1849 (#2600-z)
Christopher Gustave Memminger Papers, 1803-1915 (#502)
William Porcher Miles Papers, 1784-1906 (#508)
Orr and Patterson Family Papers, 1779-1915 (#1413)
Philip Henry Pitts Papers, 1814-1884 (#602)

Ohio

Walter Havighurst Special Collections Library, Miami University
Samuel W. Richey Confederate Collection, 1805-1936

Pennsylvania

Crawford County Historical Society
James Buchanan letters

Dickinson College, Archives and Special Collections Library
James Buchanan Papers, 1808-1991 (mc1998.10)

Franklin and Marshall College, Archives and Special Collections
Reynolds Family Papers (MS 6)

Lancaster County Historical Society
James Buchanan Collection, 1816-2008 (MG-96)
James Buchanan Family Papers (JBFP)
Harriet Lane Johnston Papers (unaccessioned)
Wheatland-Klein Collection (MG-97)

Library Company of Philadelphia
John A. McAllister Collection of Civil War Era Printed Ephemera, Graphics and Manuscripts

Pennsylvania Historical Society
Buchanan Family Papers, 1800-1910 (Collection 3193)
Chew Family Papers (Collection 2050)
George Mifflin Dallas Papers, 1791-1880 (Collection 1460A)
James Buchanan Papers, 1783-1895, undated (Collection 91)

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, State Archives
James Buchanan Collection, 1815-1863 (MG 28)

Pennsylvania State University (Special Collections Library)
James Buchanan Correspondence, 1837-1849
James Buchanan Papers, 1811-1865 (#1458)

Rosenbach Museum & Library, Philadelphia
James Buchanan Papers
Franklin Pierce Papers

South Carolina

Edgefield County Historical Society
Property & probate records
University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library
Milledge Luke Bonham Papers, 1771-1940
Preston Smith Brooks Papers, 1828-1938
Andrew Pickens Butler Papers, 1822-1855

Cantey Family Papers, 1771-1913
Elliott and Gonzales Family Papers, 1861-1865
Adley Hogan Gladden Papers, 1874-1960
Nicholson, Hughes, and Bones Family Papers, 1812-1973
Noble Family Papers, 1752-1967
James Lawrence Orr Papers, 1850-1900
Records of the University of South Carolina Board of Trustees
Waddy Thompson Papers, 1799-1978
Traylor and McClane Papers
Williams, Chesnut, and Manning Families Papers, 1682-1926

Tennessee

Tennessee State Library and Archive
John Coffee Papers, 1770-1917
James Knox Polk Papers, 1815-1949
Joanna Lucinda Rucker Letter Folio, 1845-1846

Texas

University of Texas Austin, Briscoe Center for American History
Louis Trezevant Wigfall Papers, 1839-1874

Virginia

Library of Virginia
Papers of Robert M. T. Hunter (#25064)
Garnett-Mercer-Hunter Family Papers, 1713-1853 (#20624).
Lee-Custis-Mason Papers, 1756-1863 (#20975)

Mount Vernon Ladies Association, Fred W. Smith National Library
Harriet Lane Letters

University of Virginia, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library
Papers of the Hunter and Garnett families, 1704-1940 (Mss 38-45)
John and James Murray Mason Papers (Mss 5036)
Henry Alexander Wise Letter (Mss 8630)

Virginia Historical Society
William Garnett Chisolm Papers (Mss1 C4485 a)
Edmundson Family Papers, 1781-1949 (Mss1ED598a)
Harrison Family Papers, 1756-1893 (Mss1H2485d)
Hunter Family Papers, 1766-1918 (Mss1 H9196 a FA2) [“Old Series”]
Hunter Family Papers, 1768-1928 (Mss1 H9196 b) [“New Series”]
McDonald Family Papers (Mss1M1455a 283)
Preston Family Papers (Mss1P9267d)

Robertson Family Papers (Mss1R5498b)
Yellow Sulphur Springs Guest Register (Mss4Y384a1)

College of William and Mary, Earl Gregg Swem Special Collections Library
Baird Family Papers 1656-1922 (Mss. 65 B16)
Shelton H. Short III Papers, 1970-1990 (Mss. 91 Sh9)
Tucker-Coleman Papers, 1644-1945 (Mss. 40 T79)

Washington, D.C.

Georgetown University, Archives
Minutes of the Philodemic Society

Library of Congress, Manuscript Division
John Bell Papers, 1815-1861
Breckinridge Family Papers, 1752-1965
Edmund Burke Papers, 1821-1881
George Washington Campbell Papers, 1793-1886
Caleb Cushing Papers, ca. 1785-1906
John Fairfield Correspondence, 1828-1876
Hamilton Fish Papers, 1732-1914
Eldridge Gerry Papers, 1772-1901
James Buchanan and Harriet Lane Johnston Papers, 1825-1887
James Henry Hammond Papers, 1774-1875
Abraham Lincoln Papers, 1774-1948
William L. Marcy Papers, 1806-1930
James Murray Mason Papers, 1838-1870
Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collections
 John Pendleton King correspondence, 1835
 William Rufus King correspondence, 1837
Philip Phillips Family Papers, 1832-1914.
Franklin Pierce Papers, 1820-1869
Pierce-Aiken Family Papers, 1797-1903
James Knox Polk Papers, 1775-1891
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National Quarterly Review

New Hampshire Patriot

New York Herald

New-York Daily Times

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Philadelphia Press

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